IN SEARCH OF THE SUBJECT: LOCATING THE SHIFTING POLITICS OF WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE ART

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ABSTRACT

From the late 1960s to the present, women have utilised performance art as a 'form' with which to resist, transgress, contest or reveal the position of women within wider society. However, as both the nature of feminist politics and the contexts within which the work has been produced have changed, the enactment of such oppositional strategies has also shifted. This thesis aims to locate and account for such shifts by mapping multiple subjects, including performance art, feminism(s), contemporary theory, performers and women's performance art.

In the late 1960s throughout the 1970s, the strategies most often utilised by women performance artists either offered alternative, supposedly more 'truthful' representations which drew on the real, material lives of women, or completely reimagined woman, locating her in a place before or outside of the patriarchal structure. From the 1980s onwards, however, the practice of women's performance art looks somewhat different. While performers continue to contest the material conditions and results of being positioned as female in Western society, such contestations are now often enacted from within what might be considered a 'deconstructive' or 'poststructuralist' frame. Acknowledging the impossibility of ever representing the 'real' woman, since 'woman' is always already a representation (and is always multiple), I suggest that the aim of this work is therefore not so much to reveal the 'real' woman behind the fiction, but to take apart the fiction itself, revealing the way in which the signifier 'woman' has been differentially constructed, for what purpose, and with what real effects. I have nominated this shift as a movement from a performance and politics of identity to a performance and politics of subjectivity.

December 1999: 'DISCLAIMER'

I should never be able to come to a conclusion. I should never be able to fulfil what is, I understand, the first duty of a lecturer - to hand you after an hour's discourse a nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece for ever. All I could do was to offer you an opinion [....]

Virginia Woolf
A Room of One's Own

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Finally, thanks to all those women who continue to perform, to question, to transgress, to contest and to try.

DECLARATION

Extracts of research presented in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 of this thesis have already appeared in my article 'What's In a Name?', *Studies in Theatre Production*,s 18 (December 1998), 49 - 58.

SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION
1989 - 1999: 'PATHWAYS'

19 OCTOBER 1989: 'PRE LOG'

I went to the Third Eye Centre tonight. A class outing. To see a performance, 'Herbarium', by Polish company Scena Plastyczna.

I don't know how to describe it. Bright lights. Haunting music. Figures, in white, flying through space. A body emerging from a cocoon. An egg? Slow movement. Fast movement. No movement. The unveiling of unknown things. I don't know how to describe it. I don't have the words.

The hairs in my neck rose. My breathing quickened. My heart raced. My eyes opened. Adrenaline rushed through me. I don't know what I saw. I can't decide what was before me. My thoughts flew with the flying figures, entering another place,

and another,

and another,

places in my mind that I've never been,

soaring through my imagination.

Exhilarated.

Breathless.

Alive.

Unable to talk. To come back. Still flying off somewhere else.

MARCH 1997: 'SEARCHING'

It does not happen very often. But I am compelled to keep looking.[1]

TEN YEAR RETROSPECTIVE: 'PERSONAL JOURNEYS'

To claim that seeing *Herbarium* changed my life - or at least the direction of my life - would be no exaggeration. While I had no words to describe the performance I *felt* it. and that internal movement sent me down a path that I have continued to travel for ten years.

As I began to read and see everything I could that related to 'performance art', I was amazed to discover that here was an art 'form' in which women had played a primary role ('The Amazing Decade').[2] Moreover, it was apparent that this 'role' was deeply political. As a feminist student, increasingly interested in contemporary performance, it felt as if I had finally found a place in which I could tarry and explore. What was also apparent was that I was not alone. My 'discovery', then, is my own personal discovery of a form of performance that existed before I was born. The terrain I cross already bears the multiple traces of many others before me and my search is not about 'conquering', or 'claiming' or 'naming' but about re-reading the tracks, noting the bridges, the cross-roads, the turns, the twists.[3] The terrain may already be marked but it also expands and transforms continuously, demanding new routes and remarkings. In the past decade, writing about performance art has become a prolific enterprise, and one in which feminist writings play a major part.[4] My own marks are made alongside (and indebted to), those already mapped, joining in a conversation already in full flow. Aside from my passion for performance art, what interests (even inspires) me is the ever-enlarging *dialogue* that is taking place around the subject of performance (art), between academics, between academics and performers, between performers and performers, between all of these and other cultural and state institutions. Passionate dialogue. I very much hope that this thesis will be read as entering into, and contributing to, that dialogue. Above all, though, I hope that my passion is evident.

Inspired by the experience of *Herbarium*, my undergraduate dissertation. 'Women's Performance Art: A Voice for the Voiceless', focused on women performers present at the National Review of Live Art 1990 - Anne Seagrave, Fiona Wright, Lisa Watts, Nancy Reilly. In retrospect, a better title would have been 'Voices for the Voiceless', confronted as I was with multiple voices, multiple contents, multiple styles. If I was seeking to find a unified 'feminist practice' my task was made difficult by the fact that there was no easily identifiable feminism presented. I was struck by the vast difference between what I saw here and the performances of the 1970s that I had read about. Part of me, I think, was slightly disappointed. Where was THE feminist message? Pursuing an answer to that question long after the event I realised that, in spite of the differences, these performances were still political, still 'feminist'. What became evident was that 'feminism' itself - its politics and its practice within performance - had shifted.

This thesis is an attempt to define and account for those differences, to mark the shifts that have taken place from a feminist performance practice of the 1970s to that of the late 1980s/1990s.

THE SUBJECT?

Multiple subjects would probably be more accurate:

The 'subject' is performance art.

The 'subject' is feminism.

The 'subject' is women's performance art.

The 'subject' is the feminist subject within women's performance art.

The 'subject' is the performing subject.

The 'subject' is (me) the witnessing subject.

The 'subject' is the shift in the 'subject'.

As a representational medium, performance art always has the *potential* to be extremely political. Representation does not merely mirror 'reality' but plays a part in actively producing and maintaining the ways in which we understand and view the wider social world. As Suzanna Danuta Walters writes:

> Representations *construct* sexual difference, rather than simply reflect it [...R]epresentation is *not* reflection but rather an active process of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping, of making things *mean*.[5]

My analyses of the performance art pieces dispersed throughout this thesis seek to determine both the extent to which such performances reinforce existing power relationships through a representational reinscription or, alternatively, enact a revealing and/or troubling of the representational structure that gives meaning and order to the social worlds in which we all live. The aim of much women's performance art, I suggest, is an intervention into the dominant meanings circulating around the term 'woman' and my interest lies in defining those points of resistance to and/or transgression of, this signifier.[6] My own aim, then, is to determine the purposes of these contestations and the strategies used to stage them. Admitting, at the outset, the impossibility of completely separating performances on a purely historical basis (features inherent in a 1970 performance may recur in a performance in 1998),[7] I do intend to show that there has been a *general* movement in performance art practices from the 1970s to the 1990s, in both content and politics.

I am under no illusion that 'performance art' can change the world. However, it may make us more cognisant of the way in which we both view that world and our location within it, equipping us to enact our own critical resistances. As Alisa Solomon likewise asserts:

> As an unreconstructed Brechtian, I am firmly convinced that self-conscious theater can reveal the artificiality of gender, but I certainly can't leap from there to the faith that theater will bring down the patriarchy, any more than Brecht expected epic theater to dismantle capitalism. But I do think that Brecht was right about theater's capacity to teach us a way to see critically, and to apply that critical consciousness to the world.[8]

Or, in the words of bell hooks:

> The arts remain one of the powerful, if not the most powerful, realms of cultural resistance, a space for awakening folks to critical consciousness and new vision.[9]

This is not to suggest that performance art prescribes what that new vision should be. But it does allow for the *possibility* of seeing differently, and therefore the possibility of change - even if the specific terms of that change remain undefined.

FRAMED

Returning to the title of this thesis, I must first draw attention to the problematics contained within it. This is not merely an aside concerned only with 'naming' the area of my research, but is intrinsic to the entire scope of my study, namely that it is (intentionally) difficult to position this subject on any firm or solid ground.

While my title enacts a framing mechanism, pointing to that which supposedly lies within, I am also aware that the frame functions not simply as a demarcation but as a border construct which produces both the internal and the external, the latter effectively constituting the former. Therefore, while I may wish to contain my work - indeed, within the conventions of research, it is imperative that I attempt to do so - I also know that that which I leave out will already be within. The 'others' ghosting this work include non-performance art, and the 'male'. However, if the frame is unavoidable, then this frame has the advantage of inscribing women (back) into the spaces they have often occupied, but where they have also often been ignored (in both art and theatre). I

choose to focus specifically on performance art as I believe, for reasons explored in Chapter 2, that it enables women to embrace a feminist praxis.

Equally, though I erect a 'frame' my material will necessarily - and again deliberately - extend beyond these boundaries into areas unnamed by this title, moving across disciplines and into other frames of reference as it does so. The lessons learned in the feminist movement of the late 1970s remain pertinent - one is never simply, or only, a woman. This study, then, while being pinned down to the ground of gender or sexual difference, simultaneously floats over other grounds, specifically sexuality and race. Such movement incurs a debt to 'disciplines' other than performance studies, including literary and women's studies, and queer and cultural theory.

Moreover, I cannot cite the words 'performance art', 'women' or 'politics' without being aware that each are sites of contestations. Indeed, such contestations have turned out to be the main catalysts of my research. In the first few pages of this thesis I have already fallen into the trap of positing performance art as something wholly knowable - as if it is easily identifiable and confinable within a singular nomination. Performance art, from its inception, in its inception, was created as a force to defy categorisation. While its forms, practices and purposes may have changed throughout its history, it remains impossible to provide a single, unified meaning as to what performance art is - and if, in fact, there ever was, still is, (ever will be), such a thing *as* performance art. As Steve Durland writes:

> What IS performance art? Good question, but perhaps the wrong question. Why? Because to ask 'What is performance art?' is to assume that performance is a discipline. Then, to answer the question is to come up with a set of unique characteristics that define the discipline. I personally can't think of one. [10]

In trying to move away from a singular reading of the 'it' of performance art, I am also aware of my desire to impose a false teleological history on its existence. Performance

art did not suddenly come into being and was already occurring before any attempt at categorisation was made.[11] Performance art has developed over time and continues to do so. And while one of its germinations may be witnessed in the actions of the Futurists and Dadaists, other roots surely extend into non-Western traditions. As performer Coco Fusco urgently notes of the 'genealogy' of performance art which traces it back to such movements as Dada and Surrealism, such 'genealogy is flagrantly Eurocentric'. Furthermore:

> Chronologies of the history of performance art that begin in Europe rarely, if ever, acknowledge the importance that direct and indirect contact with non-western performers played in giving shape to early twentieth century avant-garde artists' concepts of aesthetic transgression.[12]

Thus, for instance, bell hooks suggests that performance has been crucial to the African-American struggle for liberty because all that is required to 'perform' is the voice - 'an instrument that could be used by everyone, in any location.'[13]

However, for the purpose of this study, I must impose limits on myself and for this reason I erect a boundary - albeit an acknowledged false one - which locates performance art as arriving (but never having fully arrived) by the early 1970s. With the erection of this boundary I also acknowledge that all boundaries are permeable and that objects (or processes) pass both ways, leaving traces on either side. As a practice located within a social context, performance art cannot separate itself from that which precedes or surrounds it.

The word 'women' in my title is perhaps now even more problematic than the term 'performance art'. This once stable ground of location has erupted in recent years into a proliferation of theories which question what 'woman' is or if she can even be said to exist. In this thesis, then, I seek to acknowledge this problematisation of the term 'woman', whilst at the same time insisting on her presence, in the here and now, as an

embodied subject. This somewhat paradoxical situation, however, is fraught with difficulty and requires a certain balancing act, for even the notion of 'embodied' requires a critical engagement.

My writing of 'embodied' is intended to suggest the materiality of the body - the way in which our inhabiting of particular bodies carries material effects. However, these particular bodies should themselves be read as the result of various material practices. Such practices, in effect, construct the very concepts of the bodies that we are said to embody.

Feminism has consistently drawn attention to the fact that gender is a construct and that bodies become gendered through various discursive practices and the institutions in which they circulate and are maintained. Such a conception of 'gendered bodies', however, while importantly denaturalising gender, inadvertently serves to posit a body that exists *before* its gendered inscription. That is, the female body is figured as a blank slate, waiting to be transformed into a culturally constructed, gendered body. However, more recent feminist engagements with the sex/gender question, most notably that of Judith Butler, suggest that the body itself is always already gendered. The body is never unmarked matter, awaiting a cultural mark, since the very conceptions of the body that we have are already written over with cultural significance, and indeed those conceptions are historically located, since what the body signifies changes throughout history.

The term 'woman', then, used to refer to those who are anatomically sexed as female, does not place this study on any firmer ground since, in Butler's terms, it is actually gender which enables this very idea of a prediscursive, 'natural' body, awaiting its cultural inscription. For Butler, within the very concept of the neutral body, gender already exists since gender as cultural construct is read as the expression of this 'natural'.

prior to culture, sexed body. Gender, through this very process of referring back to something said to exist before gender, produces the very idea of the naturally sexed body, which gender is then said to express. As Butler writes:

> Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex (a juridical concept); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or a 'natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts.[14]

Once this idea of the 'natural' body has itself been contested, there is nothing to which gender can refer to as its ground, as that which it logically and 'naturally' expresses, since gender in fact produces its own ground through the 'performative` operations of gender.

> Gender proves to be performative - that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be [....] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results.[15]

It is through the compulsory repetition of acts inhering in gender presentations that gender itself is produced as 'natural', as expressing 'sex'.

In different, yet not unrelated terms, Susan Bordo also posits the body as something that is never experienced unmediated. That is, we can never have a direct, non-cultured experience of the body. The body, for Bordo, `is always *mediated* by constructs, associations, images of a cultural nature`.[16]

Such reconceptualisations of `the body` institute a certain nervousness around writing about those bodies marked 'female`. How can one write about `women`s performance art', when `women' are constructed through specific historical and cultural frames? That said, however, it is surely imperative to acknowledge that while `women`, and their experiences, may be the result of discursive formations, and are not then in any

sense 'real' or 'Truthful', they still nonetheless exist in the here and now.[17] That is, one must position the material body of 'woman' as a historically conditional and contingent construct - thus contesting its assumed 'natural', unchanging materiality - whilst simultaneously admitting that this materiality, even if constructed, still *does* produce real effects for those inhabiting that construct. Thus, 'woman' may not exist, but women positioned within that location most definitely and variously do and one must work within that space between 'woman' as construct and 'woman' as a living subject, located within a present culture. As Bordo persuasively argues, while the body may be read as a text, and as textually constructed and therefore able to be deconstructed, the 'lived', inhabited, body is also always located in a cultural context, in which racism, sexism, and heterosexism remain productive and oppressive forces.

Within this thesis, then, I attempt to operate a double strategy - putting the nomination 'woman' under contest, whilst not denying that that nomination has a material effect on those who inhabit - and inherit and resist - that construction. The body of 'woman' may not be 'real', in any essentialist sense, but that does not mean that such bodies do not exist, in this culture, at this present time, even if their parameters are continuously contested and transgressed. 'Woman' is *both* a construct *and* an embodied subject. Avtar Brah, finding herself similarly positioned, aims 'to deconstruct the idea of "woman", exposing it as a heterogeneous and contested category even as [she] analyse[s] the practices of "Asian women" as historically produced and embodied subjects'.[18] The 'Women' in my title, then, refers to those performers cited within this text who *are*, in this time and place, women, whilst my critical focus concentrates on the ways in which these same women potentially trouble the very concept(s) of 'woman'.

In the late 1990s it may be imperative to acknowledge the contested status of 'woman' and to use this knowledge as hindsight when critiquing work of the past, but I

think it is equally crucial to locate the work of 'history' within its own time. Only by doing this is it possible to define the shifts in political strategising undertaken by women performance artists. The ways in which performances were executed in the early 1970s may be different to the present time but they were executed in a particular historical moment affected by diverse social, political and economic factors, each of which had a determining influence on the what to do, the why to do it and the way to do it. As forces change so too do counter-forces and vice-versa. The performance work of women in the early 1970s would undoubtedly fail the litmus-test of today's undecidability, but in its own time it was no less radical in its intentions and processes and it is unlikely that the shifts I identify could have taken place without this earlier foray into the politics of representation. I acknowledge here, then, that my critical retrospective look is one which could only be taken from my privileged position of being located in the future of the past.

The 'politics' with which I am concerned are those of 'feminist politics'. Like performance art, feminism changes with time. I make no apologies for providing only the broadest definition of feminism here which is that it is a critique of a system which positions women negatively and - borrowing from Linda Gordon - is 'formed and offered in the light of a will to change it, which in turn assumes that it is changeable'.[19] At the outset, I stress the fact that there is no 'one' feminism, but that there are various feminist political strategies. Nearly thirty years after the birth of the Women's Liberation Movement, feminism remains an undecided term, and perhaps this very undecidability is its particular strength - a strength, moreover, which can be usefully capitalised on. Though I examine radical and materialist feminist ideologies of the 1970s and 1980s, drawing links between these and particular performances from the same period,[20] I go on to refocus specifically on the concept of 'undecidability', as explicated by Diane Elam.[21]

exploring what (one form of) 'feminist politics' might mean at the end of the twentieth century, examining the relationship between this and contemporary women's performance. This refocusing is not intended to suggest a break between earlier feminisms and more recent feminist approaches, but to identify a potential development or extension.

DIRECTIONS

This thesis circulates around the problematisations of, and relationships between, the terms 'performance art', 'women' and 'feminist politics'. Chapter 1 questions my own (and others') use of the term 'performance art' exploring it as a contested term, a contested practice and a contested site of research. Linking performance art to its immediate predecessors, thereby locating it within an historical art context - and here I may fall foul of the Westernization criticised by Fusco - I provide a brief outline of *some* of the movements leading up to the coining of the term 'performance art', including Action Paintings, Happenings and Fluxus. I then go on to challenge theorist Josette Féral's suggestion that 'performance art' is 'dead' because its initial 'function' has disappeared. I strongly believe that performance art has always had more than one function, and that it changes as the social conditions within which it is located change. Its 'function(s)' may have altered (and I will question this assertion), but that does not necessarily mean that as a practice it is no longer valid.

Chapter 2 locates performance art politically, tracing the political turmoil of the 1950s, '60s and '70s. Specifically, it documents examples of women's performance art of the early/mid 1970s, contextualising them in their own period - particularly in relation to the Women's Liberation Movement and the 'art world' - offering suggestions as to

why women should have turned to this practice for personal expression. I also explore the prominence of solo performance in both the USA and Britain.

Following this contextual framework, an analysis is undertaken of Suzanne Lacy's performance, *Three Weeks in May* (1977), which I suggest is one example of a materialist (constructionist) feminist performance practice of the 1970s. Lacy deliberately represents the 'real' conditions of women's lives in an attempt to change such conditions, but importantly, she figures these conditions as being the result of specific social structures rather than as being inevitable. In contrast to this, I then cite other performances which I read as attempts to imagine and figure the 'pre-constructed' woman - the woman before the Law or patriarchy, aligning these with a radical (or essentialist) feminist practice.

Chapter 3 focuses on Carolee Schneemann's performance, *Interior Scroll* (1975 - 1977), which I initially position as a radical feminist piece. I then reread the performance through a psychoanalytical lens, alongside Hélène Cixous' theory of 'writing the body', attempting to dislodge both Schneemann and Cixous from an essentialist charge. The body, for the performance artist, *is* simultaneously both the tool of, and for, inscription. The body is always already marked and in many cases what is attempted is a re-marking, a different marking of this body, which in turn hopes to prompt a different reading. However, in other instances what is revealed in performance is the very process of marking - the way in which the body is made to mean, and the structures that uphold and inscribe such meanings.

In a final reading, through prioritising the presence of the live body, I suggest that what might simply be read as being a performance about the 'natural nature' of woman can be simultaneously re-read as a performance that troubles multiple binaries, including woman/artist, sacred/profane, naked/nude, internal/external, nature/culture. My

doubling-back suggests that it is difficult (and dangerous) to fix these performers into neatly partitioned feminist categories, since sometimes they belong to more than one category, and often they shift between them. Positioning is perhaps, in the last instance, dependent on the one who sees (and the direction of their look).

Finally, reckoning with Jill Dolan's assertion that

> the representation of bodies is always ideologically marked; it always connotes gender, which carries with it the meanings inscribed by the dominant culture[22]

the last section of this chapter takes a revised look at the works so far cited. The focus shifts to the problems intrinsic to such works by engaging with the tension between identity and subjectivity, and the politics implicated in that tension, as suggested by Judith Butler. Examining the use of autobiography and personal experience within performance art as a ground upon which to construct 'truth' claims about the 'real' of women I suggest that the signifier 'woman' remains unproblematised in much of this work, since 'woman', as an identity category, is implicitly assumed in advance.

In Chapter 4 I elucidate a strategy that I believe to be potentially useful to feminism, namely a deconstructive approach to politics.[23] Placing deconstruction beside feminism, as Diane Elam does, radically shifts the nature of feminist politics to a stress on undecidability - that is, we do not yet know what 'woman' is, or has been, and should resist offering up an already fixed notion, with already decided political aims. Instead, each aim should be negotiated, and each result re-negotiated.

In this chapter I suggest that the ways in which the personal is used today is somewhat removed from its occurrence in the 1970s. In place of the posited 'real' of experience I determine the means by which performers have drawn on the personal while simultaneously resisting positing their identity as fixed or essential. Exploring Bobby Baker's performance, *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* (1988 - 1989), alongside

Sidonie Smith's work on women's autobiographical writing, I elucidate the productive contradiction between 'truth' and 'performance' which enables a resistance to the essentialised performing subject and subject of performance.[24] Within the history of feminism alone, one can see acutely the danger of calling on or promoting a 'truth' of identity - such truth will be productive, partial, will exclude others who do not fit the picture, and will reduce differences to the Same - 'we're all women, so we're all the same'.

In Chapter 5 I further my analysis of subjectivity in performance by examining Annie Sprinkle's piece *Post Post Porn Modernist* (1994). Within this analysis, I explore the good/bad girl binary that Sprinkle foregrounds, and her attempts to dislodge this by simultaneously straddling the binary whilst showing its construction. I focus particularly on her 'self' as self-invention and her multiple, shifting identities, which resist essentialisation. In a sense, Sprinkle plays herself performatively. She is always coming (metaphorically and literally) and remains fluid. Prompted by Gerry Harris' engagement with Sprinkle's work as one which 'might be described as producing shifting and contradictory identifications *in the spectator*',[25] I close my analysis of this performance by performing a rereading of my spectatorship.

This analysis of Sprinkle's performance is followed with an exploration of *The Constant State of Desire* (1986), by Karen Finley. Again, the notion of multiple positions is foregrounded. In this performance, Finley literalises the metaphorical content of psychoanalytical discourse by playing it across her body, thus revealing the horror of the so-called unconscious. Working within psychoanalysis, Finley stages a critique of it, but resists offering an alternative.

The final section of this chapter positions Rona Lee's performance, *Avid Metamorphosis I* (1995), somewhat in contrast to Finley's performance. While both

draw on psychoanalytical concepts they do so in very different ways. Lee's performance uses no spoken text and consists largely of repetitive actions - namely, the unpicking of a suit. This unpicking suggests the notion of unpicking the system of representation, which relies on the positioning of the 'other' to see oneself.[26] Lee resists being positioned as other here by making herself 'unrecognisable' or strange, engaging with Peggy Phelan's notion of the power of the 'unmarked' in contrast to the assumed power of the visible or represented. As Phelan comically indicates, 'if representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young women should be running Western culture.'[27]

Acutely aware that the preceding chapters focus on performances by white, heterosexual women (although Sprinkle is ambiguously placed here), in the final two chapters I cross sexual difference with sexuality and 'race'. These chapters are not located in isolation from the preceding work as the threads already woven are further developed.

Chapter 6 centres on analyses of representations of lesbian sexuality within performance. Problems parallel to those raised elsewhere are explored, such as the struggle around the nomination 'lesbian', and the rise of queer politics and theory as a replacement of, or challenge to, 'lesbian theory'.[28] In relation to the previous chapters I also mark the shift from the notion of an essentially fixed sexual identity, locating strategies within performances that deliberately question such stability and the blurring of boundaries that ensues. Specifically, I am interested in how one might perform sexuality differently (with the *double entendre* 'perform' being used consciously). Can one perform lesbianism on (and off) stage in a way that refuses to set it up only in opposition to heterosexuality? Can one perform lesbianism in a way that questions that nomination, or the assumed stability of that identity, or any other sexuality? Alternatively, are we only what we perform?

Such questions, prompted by theorists including Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler, proliferate in my analyses of *Dyke Cum Fag* (1994) by Victoria Goodwin Baker, and *Female Deviations: Autobiographies of Desire* (1996) by Anita Loomis, both of which shift between 'lesbian' and 'queer', troubling 'heterosexuality' and all normative conceptions of sexuality in the process. I do not attempt to definitively answer questions raised but instead offer more questions. These performances deliberately block the process of arriving at some 'end' point, provoking, instead, open-ended discussion, continual re-negotiation, and incessant instability.

Chapter 7 examines performances by 'black' women, again courting discussion of representation and visibility and the purpose of my separating these performances into different chapters. While there is considerable debate about the efficacy of the politics of visibility,[29] a debate with which I have sympathy, it is important to acknowledge that the body is still *embodied*, a lived experience, and the different positions in which our bodies are located will carry different ramifications. Thus, although the effects of being located in Western society as a lesbian or a black woman (never mind a black lesbian) are different from each other, they are also different from the experiences of white, heterosexual women. While the terms 'black' and 'lesbian' are perhaps rightly contested, the lived experience of being either (or both) of these bears a material weight in a racist, heterosexist society. The body is always a surface of significations located within a pre-existing 'symbolic' order.[30] As Biddy Martin and others have stated, in much current theory the material body (even if it is a constructed one), does not bear enough of a drag on signification.[31]

In this chapter, then, I look specifically at the difficulty of representing a ground from which one can fight for equality, or fight against racism, while resisting fixing that ground for all eternity. Or, borrowing the words of cultural theorist Stuart Hall:

> What is it like to live, by attempting to valorise and defeat the marginalization of the variety of Black subjects and to really begin to recover the lost histories of a variety of Black experiences, while at the same time recognizing the end of any essential Black subject?[32]

I determine that the problems of defining oneself as 'black' are similar (but not identical) to those already examined in relation to the definitions 'woman' or 'lesbian' - such categories are frequently exclusive and oppressive. In place of such bounded notions of identity, I draw on the theory of hybridity, where 'identity' is understood to be multiaxial, as opposed to singular. Throughout this chapter I identify performances, such as Maya Chowdhry's *The Sacred House* (1994), in which hybridity or multilocationality is represented, pursuing the notion of a dialogic performance strategy (indebted to Mae Gwendolyn Henderson's engagement with black women writers who are always already doubled), as a way to escape from the confines of a singular position of identity.[33] Confronted by my own race-blindness as a spectator of Nao Bustamante's *America, the Beautiful* (1995), I suggest that such dialogism must also be performed by the spectator.

The various analyses of performances undertaken throughout this thesis aim to determine different strategies of political intervention or subversion used by female performance artists, in turn suggesting that from the early 1970s to the late 1990s there has been a marked shift within performance from a politics of identity to a politics of subjectivity. That is, the politics on display within performance art are no longer grounded on the given nomination 'woman' (a knowable entity) and the gaining of 'her' equal rights, but instead actively question the concept of this nomination, asking 'what does the signifier "woman" mean (and do)?' Can we ever be sure of its meaning, since it signifies variously, in different ways and in different contexts? More radically, what 'woman' means is always already constructed within discourse. It is impossible to dig down and (re)find the 'real', pre- or non-discursive woman. Instead, many performers

today engage with the discourses that position women in certain places while revealing how (and at what cost) such discourses work (and fail to work). That is, the women cited in the second section of this thesis do not attempt to represent women 'as they really are', since such an exercise is bound to failure. What they attempt to do instead, and urgently, is show how it is that women are positioned where they are, what system(s) that positioning maintains, and the effects - very real effects - that such positioning produces. Their resistances are often located in their act of excessive staging.

CROSS-ROADS, BRIDGES AND ROUNDABOUTS

The explorations undertaken within this thesis are not aligned with one methodological approach. I am not so much interested in pursuing performance art's connection with one over-arching methodology (for instance psychoanalysis), as aiming to be strategically flexible. My research is multiply located, offering a variety of horizons through an engagement with a number of theories, including but not limited to, psychoanalysis. I choose to adopt this approach because I believe that the performances I (re)cite actively intersect with a number of discourses and my use of various methodological tools will hopefully illuminate these intersections.

What has also become apparent, and has prompted my decision to approach the subject from a variety of routes, is that the metanarratives used within studies which adopt one methodological viewpoint have themselves become questioned. While I do not think that such questioning renders these methodologies totally obsolete (indeed, the questions depend on the prior existence of the methodologies), I do think that they signal the danger of attempting to explain everything using one grand theory. Within each theory there are contradictions, omissions and silences (often revealed in the

performances I cite). As a reaction against such metanarratives, and the power implicated within them, there has been a recognition of the need to adopt a multiple approach to the area of study. It is within this newly formed approach that I seek to place myself, deliberately resisting the production of an underlying 'Truth' and offering up instead a number of possibilities.

In certain sections of this thesis I have attempted what I would suggest is a performance style of writing about performance. One of the difficulties that presents itself when engaging with performance after the event is that as a live, temporal act, it cannot be reproduced 'as it happened'. This difficulty of 'writing' about performance has been increasingly highlighted. As Peggy Phelan remarks in a memorable assertion:

> As those artists who have dedicated themselves to performance continually disappear and leave 'not a rack behind' it becomes increasingly imperative to find a way to remember the undocumentable, unreproducible art they made. The paradox is that in writing a testimony to the power of the undocumentable and nonreproductive I engage the document of the written reproducible text itself.[34]

Similarly, Adrian Heathfield, in his introduction to the anthology *Shattered Anatomies*, confronts this paradox of taking the liveness out of 'live performance' by submitting it to the written and reproducible word. While noting that there *are* some benefits to be had for both the performer and the critic in this transformational process, he goes on to acknowledge the power implicit in this act of reinscription:

> Like an old colonial machine, the academy relentlessly surveys fresh cultural territory and submits it to its discursive control. It may bestow a little cultural capital along the way, but its institutional powers, within which many of us necessarily work, are turned towards the mastery of evasive phenomena by their conversion into objects of knowledge. Subjected to the proprieties of this knowledge machine, cultural events are surveyed, measured, identified and transformed into appropriate, lasting, material remainders.[35]

The body of work, then, becomes another body subjected to systems of surveillance, categorisation and control. Writing is not a transparent, innocent act, but is acutely

connected to systems of power, reinforcing and maintaining certain boundaries even as it attempts to destabilise others. However, as Marvin Carlson notes in his conclusion to *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, such recognition does not mean the abandonment of research and writing:

> What it has done is alert [me] to the illocutionary and perlocutionary implications of [my] discourse, to consider how knowledge is created, shared, and legitimized, how fields of study are created, developed, and their boundaries protected, how social, cultural and personal identity is involved in every sort of performative behaviour.[36]

Like Carlson, then, I will not stop writing but neither will I pretend that what I produce is innocent or transparent (and I will address my own 'border' and 'margin' constructions in a moment). Instead, I offer my writing as one more space in which an other (or - in anticipation - another me) can translate and negotiate to produce something else.[37] In a more material sense writing is 'always already an operation of power', since it is embedded within 'an economy of power-knowledge in which value is accorded to things that last and things that don't are routinely trashed'.[38] Writing lasts, performance art is ephemeral, existing only in the moment of the present. As a result, however, it can never be faithfully recited.

In moving away from the more conventional style of thesis writing in parts of this study, I hope to capture something of the live element of the performance by staging my own writing about it as an event that takes place between the performance text and my own spectatorship. In this sense, the text that I produce will deliberately not (attempt to) be a text of the performance I witnessed but will be a text in its own right that stands beside the 'original' one.[39]

I am not, then, aiming to produce historical 'documentations' of the productions, nor am I attempting to provide exhaustive performance analyses which engage with

every level of the productions, dismantling each sign system individually. Instead, I am interested in (re)producing the moment of interaction between myself and certain performances. (Of course, a faithful reproduction is impossible, since my remembering obviously does not take place in the moment of the performance.) In this sense I view myself as a mediator of the performance text. The reader of this text - here and now - will be reading the event of my reading of the performance, which will hopefully produce another event for the reader. In order to show this interaction between my 'self' and the performances, I have included, in the case of *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*, a transcribed version of the spoken performance text (with stage descriptions) *beside* my own responses to it. Similarly, my attempt to 'show' *Female Deviations of Desire* results in the interruptions of my thoughts by a transcribed section of the spoken text. Aware that this breaks with the 'convention' of placing such material in an Appendix, I defend my reciting and situating of it within the body of my own writing by suggesting that such a citing/siting enables a dialogue between the (at least) two texts. In my writing about both *Post Post Porn Modernist* and *Female Deviations* my 'academic self' is overwritten by the experiences of my 'spectating self', revealing in the process my own multivalent subjectivity. Such mediations are, of course, influenced by my own spectatorial positioning, and my writing therefore proceeds from a variety of locations, including academic, white, lesbian, female, and is produced from within a variety of discursive frames including ethnicity, gender, sexual difference and sexuality. As I return to reread my spectatorship of *Post Post Porn Modernist*, *Female Deviations* and *America, the Beautiful*, such locations and frames are made evident through the dissonance, competition and movement staged between and within them.

My opening up of each of the performance 'texts' to reveal their strategies and politics is not an opening intended to lead to closure by offering a definitive (and final)

reading. The readings I volunteer are not grounded in the performers ('authors') intentions but are located in the charged space between the performed text and my own spectatorial position. Remembering Barthes:

> Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author [...] beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' - victory to the critic.[40]

I am not aiming for such a victory here. However, the 'Author' of a performance *is* an embodied subject, existing in space and time in front of me. Aware that too often women have been silenced, or erased from history, I do not wish to repeat the same violation here. Though I resist digging downwards to locate the performer's voice *within* the performance, I will, where applicable, situate the performer as a live and embodied subject existing within, and therefore affected by, a nexus of social conditions.

OTHER JOURNEYS

This study is limited to a certain number of performances, in an attempt to engage with them in some depth. However, many of the uncited performances witnessed by me over numerous years have undoubtedly informed my thinking. One of the most difficult challenges I faced was actually choosing what to include and what to exclude. My criteria for selection can be detected in the performances that are cited: the majority are British or North American, each represents particular strategies of intervention, rather than being representative of any particular 'type' of performance art, and most are solo performances.

The reason for my concentration on North American and British performance artists is embedded within a larger research aim that extends beyond the frame(s) of this

thesis. While my interest here is in exploring political shifts within women's performance art practice, during the early stages of my research other questions repeatedly surfaced: how do performances in the USA differ to those originating in Britain (with all the problems that 'originating' suggests)? Are the politics circulating within the pieces the same? Can comparisons be made between the two countries? If there are differences, how can these be explained? What are the similarities and cross-overs, the shared, adopted and borrowed goals and strategies? That such questions should arise in the first place suggests that this is an area which needs to be further explored.

The tentative observations that I offer here are that in Northern America the politics on display are more localised and singular, tending to deal with aspects of the personal (what I would call a 'politics of the individual'), while in Britain, the politics have tended to be more systemic, casting a wider net. Such differences can presumably be traced to the different political histories of intervention, where such intervention in the USA was grounded in the notion of the 'free individual', and the 'American Dream', while in Britain the slant has traditonally tended towards a broader and more socialist scope.

In terms of presentational styles too, recent work in the USA seems more verbally textual and directly 'confessional' than in Britain. There is perhaps a stronger cultural tradition for 'confessional' practices in the States, spanning 'self-help groups', and the proliferating number of 'self-revelation' shows, such as Ronaldo, Oprah and Rikki Lake (although if the televised shows in Britain are anything to go by, we may be catching up). The 'revealed body' within American performance is also prevalent, perhaps linked to the historically more directly political confrontational address of much American performance art, which often aimed to 'shock' the spectator out of complacency and into a response. In Britain, by contrast, greater emphasis is placed on

what I would term 'imagistic performance', with less direct reference to the personal. The body more often remains under wraps, while the 'politics' seem to come in by the back door, so to speak, with the route taken being more indirect. Or perhaps what I mean is more 'British' (which begs the question of what that means). Of course, I am risking staging huge generalisations here, but I am not the first to do so. Simon Herbert offers some interesting subjective insights when he writes that:

> The peculiar conventions and restrictions of British (or, more accurately) English lifestyles continue to exert defining forces on our artists and audiences [....] English society continues to react to multiculturalism with a paternal pat, and gender issues with a jocular predilection for smutty jokes.
>
> And so it is that UK performance monologists [*sic*] like Bobby Baker and Sylvia Ziranek may create a metaphor from baking an apple pie, but Karen Finley will stuff if up her ass.[41]

Herbert goes on to suggest that it is the difference in population numbers that produces such differences in form and content, since British artists 'can rarely lay claim to representing a community of more than one', the result of which is that 'the consequent advancement of a centre/edge discourse has been impeded by its continual relegation to older formal issues'. Am I too suggesting, then, that British performance artists' tendency to represent oblique images rather than direct political statements is a result of their continued examination of issues relating to the 'form' of representation? I think that there is more to this than meets Herbert's eye. The politics in Bobby Baker's pieces are evidently not only concerned with purely formal issues, but are very much connected to a feminist politics. The form is perhaps a camouflage for the politics or, in Baker's piece *Drawing On a Mother's Experience*, while the sheet onto which she paints may initially cover over and therefore hide the politics, they nevertheless literally seep through.

Nick Kaye has also attempted to map out some of the differences between North American and British performance art, with such differences being grounded in the practice's relationship to art and theatre. Thus, in North America, according to Kaye, performance art has been 'theorized against the terms and integrities of the work in art rather than in relation to "theatre" or "drama"'. In Britain, however, performance art of the 1960s and 1970s

> was not only shadowed by the strength of the politically radical and largely text-based alternative British theatre, but shared some of its practices and concerns. [...] Whereas North American and continental European artists were clearly concerned to theorise their own activities, frequently siting 'performance' between theatre and the legacy of the art-object and 'concept art', debates over the identity of this British Performance Art have invariably returned to an uncertain relationship with dominant theatre practices.[42]

Similarly, Marvin Carlson asserts that while performance artists in the USA and the European continent tended to emphasise their artistic backgrounds, 'many British performance artists from the beginning consciously incorporated into their experiments material from street mime, clown acts, and traditional vaudeville and burlesque.'[43]

Kaye and Carlson certainly raise interesting points here, and it would be useful to determine in more depth the forerunners of performance art in Britain, as has so consistently been done in the USA, if only to examine where performance art is now in relation to where it was in the past - and where it might go in the future. However, while the legacy of political and fringe theatre of the late 1960s may be one of the influential figures in British performance art history, there are surely others - what of the impact of performance practices crossing continents and those coming from other European countries? Furthermore, there was presumably some link between British performance art and art, even if the strongest connection was to political theatre? Where *is* the 'art' in British performance art?

Interestingly, both Kaye and Carlson cite such performance groups as Welfare State and The People Show as precursors of British performance art. Contextualising both of these groups, it becomes evident that the 'art' of performance art can not be so easily sidelined. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s it is apparent that there were many performance events staged throughout Britain that were more directly linked to 'art' than to 'theatre'. John Latham had already set fire to his first skoob tower in 1958, while art students and teachers were finding expression in a radical cross-over between popular music and art, as exemplified by The Temperance Seven who played 1920s and 1930s music in the 1950s, dressed ironically in Edwardian clothes. In fact, Günter Berghaus singles out the relationship between music and Happenings as being responsible for producing a different performance aesthetic in Britain, in comparison to the USA and other European countries: 'Many Happenings were featured as surprise elements in rock concerts. They were often organised by members of the pop group, who changed the musical and theatrical style of their performances in order to accommodate these "interludes" in their stage shows or even to make then an integral element of them.' According to Berghaus, although the audiences at such concerts may be educated, few had any art college training:

> As a consequence, the performers made little intellectual demand on the club visitors. Many Happenings resembled a vaudeville show, a Monty Python sketch, or a scene from a Beano comic.[44]

The first cited 'Happening' in Britain has been attributed to Adrian Henri, staged in 1962 at the Merseyside Arts Festival. This multi-media event was described by Henri as a mixture of 'poetry, rock 'n' roll and assemblage'.[45] Also in 1962, gallery owner Victor Musgrave presented a Fluxus exhibition entitled *The Misfits*, which included Ben Vautier's performance of 'living and sleeping in the window'. In the same year, at a

Fluxus evening at the ICA, Robin Page performed his 'Guitar Piece', in which he kicked a guitar around the commercial galleries in Cork Street. In 1963 the infamous Edinburgh Festival 'Happening' was staged by Allan Kaprow and Ken Dewey, and in 1965 Ken Dewey and Charles Marowitz performed Happenings in the basement of 'Better Books' in London. In 1966 Jeff Nuttall presented his environment, 'The Marriage', in the same basement, and introduced Mark Long, founder of The People Show, to the space. The People Show actually began with performances of material by Jeff Nuttall. Robin Page, the Fluxus artist noted above, met John Fox at Leeds College of Art, where both were teachers, and Fox went on to found the performance group Welfare State.

Although the above represent only a few of the artists mixing forms in the 1950s and 1960s, two features are already apparent. First, the large majority of these figures came out of art schools. Secondly, there appears to have been a 'network' of artists who came into contact with each other which must undoubtedly have had an effect on the work that each produced. Kaye himself states that such groups developed largely through work in art or music schools, and that 'British performance is still marked by its origins outside conventional theatre practices [...] characterised by practices and vocabularies not readily reconciled with the political and textual discourses of 70s political theatre.' However, Kaye's point seems to be that the relationship between 'theatre' and 'performance art' in Britain is explicit, even if that relationship is one of opposition. Thus, in the 1980s, '"performance" is invariably characterised, first of all, as "not theatre", belying a sense that, at this time, a separate field has not somehow been fully marked out or made sufficiently distinct.'[46] Yet from the records detailing artistic experiments of the 1950s and 1960s in Britain, it seems probable that the groups and individuals noted above were also entering into a dialogue with 'art', as well as being influenced by artists from both America and other European countries. According to

Berghaus, for instance, 'a large number of early British fringe and experimental touring companies evolved from the Happenings scene.'[47]

What is evident is that much more extensive research needs to be undertaken to enable comparative lines of reference to be drawn between performance art in Britain and in the USA. I hope that the research already covered within this thesis will feed productively into such future work. The geographical boundaries of this study, then, are the result of such 'forward planning'.

Another, perhaps more problematic, exclusionary frame in operation within this thesis is my concentration on solo performers. While I do include collaborative performances such as Suzanne Lacy's *Three Weeks in May*, the majority of the works referenced here are solo pieces. One reason for this is that there is something of a 'tradition' (if one can use that word in relation to 'performance art') of solo performance art and the majority of performances continue to be solo. Secondly, I am specifically interested in the way in which the personal gets played out in performance, the way in which female performers address issues of identity and subjectivity - that is, the performing (and troubling) of personal locations - and it is these questions that are frequently posed in solo performance art pieces.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that there is another 'tradition' operating within performance art which is equally aligned to a feminist politics. This 'tradition' could be termed collaborative and co-operative work and appears alongside solo work of the 1970s and 1980s, represented by such groups as The Waitresses and Bloodgroup. Thus, though I choose to concentrate on solo work it should be recognised that other models have existed and continue to do so. Had I chosen to look at these other models the questions raised may have been very different. By focusing on the place where the 'subject' of the performer is often central, my study is perhaps inevitably

biased in suggesting a shift from 'identity' (and the problems contained within this concept), to the positive potentials offered by staging 'subjectivity'. (However, I also think it is important to acknowledge that from the 1980s to the present day there *has* been a consistent shift away from collaborative and co-operative models towards solo performances. In Chapter 2 I will suggest reasons for this shift.)

These other models of performance art offer another area to be researched in the future. How do the solo and the collaborative differ? What are the possible potentials offered by these models for staging the 'differences' within and between 'women'? Do collaborations subsume differences under the common term 'woman', or are the same questions being explored within this other work, albeit in different ways? Where do the boundaries between 'solo' and 'collaborative' blur or produce tensions and at what points are they held apart?

I must also confess, however, that on a more subjective level all of the pieces I have chosen to include are also performances which have interested me - they have inspired, challenged, or moved me.[48] This does not mean that I judged them to be necessarily 'good' performances since I am not concerned with such qualitative statements. What I am concerned with is my 'reaction' to them - as a white woman, as a lesbian, as a feminist and as a theoretician.[49]

The majority of the performances that I cite throughout have been witnessed live by me between 1989 and 1998, in both Britain and the USA. However, on occasion I have resorted to using only video documentation of performances that I have not personally seen live, because I felt that the documentational video provided me with enough information to write about the performance and that those performances merited inclusion because they offered something specific to engage with, in terms of the areas I

am looking at. In the footnotes I will designate the date of the performance and whether I am analysing a live or recorded version of it.

In those cases where I have used only recordings to support my ideas, I have resisted offering up projected personal spectatorial responses to the event but instead propose suggestions or use other's reactions that have been documented. As my frame of reference stretches back to the 1970s, there are instances where not even video documentations exist and I rely on the materials available, such as slides, reviews, and printed texts associated with the performance. In one instance - when analysing Karen Finley's *The Constant State of Desire* - I use a printed text of the performance. My engagement with and assertions about this piece, then, are based on my response to the written text, articles and reviews relating to it, photographic documentation, other people's responses to the piece, and my experience of seeing another of Finley's performances.[50]

I make no claim that using this other material is comparable to seeing the performance live. My interaction with each of these materials will be shaped by the form of them. As Adrian Heathfield writes:

> Undoubtedly each of these reproductive forms will enact distinct kinds of translation, operating differently on the event and recreating it in specific ways according to their own inherent formal dynamics and traditions.[51]

READING MY OWN TRACKS

The imbrication of the three strands pursued in this thesis - feminist politics, feminist theory and performance art - could be (and has been) perceived as being problematic. Both performance art and the theory that I use have been criticised for being elitist and therefore for being removed from, if not oppositional to, feminist politics.[52]

It is apparent, however, that certain binary oppositions are being reinscribed and maintained within such a critique, oppositions which I would seek to destabilise here. On the one hand, theory is being held as distinct from political practice or activism, and on the other, 'high art' is being positioned in distinction to 'low art' (or variations on this binary, such as elitist/accessible, minority/popular).

At the outset, I would like to suggest that while it may be argued that only a small percentage of the population actually attend performance art events, performance art does not exist in a cultural vacuum, and its potential impact, or effect, extends beyond the frames of its specific locations. Thus, certain strategies implemented in performance art make their way into other cultural mediums, including film, theatre, and even advertising. (Nothing is sacred.) Performance art does not travel down a one way street.

Equally, while performance art pieces more frequently occur within gallery spaces today, some continue to be sited in public spaces. Walk through many city centres and it is probable that you will happen across busking performance artists, encircled by bemused, amused, or entertained 'shoppers' - all, whatever their reaction, watching. In addition, aside from the cross-overs between mediums, there is a crossover between spaces. Many clubs now employ 'walk-abouts', a name given to those who would once perhaps have been called 'performance artists', and many of the larger clubs actually programme their own stage shows which adopt or adapt certain features from performance art, particularly in the use of the live body within the performance, and the non-matrixed nature of the events displayed. Moreover, a number of performance artists move between spaces, appearing in a variety of contexts and using a mixture of mediums, a point explored in Chapter 1.

In Britain, performance art has also become more accessible through the medium of television. This may seem paradoxical since performance art is presumed to be a live event, and that anything shown on television is necessarily not performance art but a derivative of it. Those artists shown on television, though, continue to be described *as* performance artists. In the past year programmes have been broadcast which potentially expose such artists as Mona Hatoum, Bobby Baker, Ron Athey and Orlan to a wide and varied audience.

While such programmes may be placed within the public frame of 'transgressive' and 'excessive', the impact will extend beyond this frame.[53] Such publicity prompts wider and more general discussions around issues raised by the event, which serves to bring more people into contact with performance art. Thus, in the case of Orlan, or Finley, or Athey, the question most frequently asked is: 'Is this art/theatre?' which, in turn, produces further questioning: 'What is art? Who decides? Do artists have a free licence to do anything they want? Should artists be supported by public money?[54] What are artists' responsibilities to their audience? What are programmers' responsibilities to their audience?'[55] The net of performance art, then, is cast much wider than the performance art event itself and the questions or responses that it provokes and prompts are deeply political. The 'audience' for performance art extends beyond the gallery walls.

What, though, is the relation between theory and the theorist, and political practice and performance? Where is one to locate the theorist in the creation and occupation of political space?:

> Is the language of theory merely another ploy of the culturally privileged Western elite to produce a discourse of the Other that reinforces its own power-knowledge equation?[56]

Homi Bhabha answers his own question by suggesting that:

> there are many forms of political writing whose different effects are obscured when they are divided between the 'theoretical' and the 'activist'.[57]

Feminist theory and feminist practice are much closer and relational than the binary which situates them as opposites would suggest. If one agrees that subjects are constructed *within* discourse, then one task of feminist theory (like feminist performance) is to ask how discourses construct specific subjects and objects of politics, unveiling the contingency of the 'here and now'. Feminist theory, in order to enact an intervention, must enter into dominant discourse and, again in the words of Homi Bhabha, translate and negotiate so that new possible subjects and objects can emerge. This, surely, is a political act.

Feminist politics are also, of course, discursively powerful and therefore one discourse that the feminist critic must enter into is her own. The feminist critic must ask: 'who is being represented within (my) feminist politics? Who is the subject of my politics? Who are the necessary, excluded 'others' that enable this 'subject of feminism' to be constructed?' As Judith Butler writes:

> Through what exclusions has the feminist subject been constructed, and how do those excluded domains return to haunt the 'integrity' and 'unity' of the feminist we.[58]

> It is not the feminist critic's aim to close down this field of feminist enquiry, to suggest or promise one solution. Since each new space produced by translation and negotiation will lead to other translations and negotiations and these in turn to other new spaces the movement of theory is without end. The feminist critic does not strive to produce a final strategy that will 'fix everything once and for all', or even suggest the possibility of this. As Bhabha states:

> From the perspective of negotiation and translation [...] there can be no final discursive *closure* of theory. It does not foreclose on the political, even though battles for power-knowledge may be won or lost to great effect. The corollary is that there is no first or final act of revolutionary social (or socialist) transformation.[59]

Or, in the words of Diane Elam:

> feminism is about keeping sexual difference open as the space of a radical uncertainty. We do not yet know what women can do...[60]

The theorist's task, then, is to open up such spaces, not in order to reach some already imagined future utopia but to continuously change (and challenge) the course of the feminist imagination. We do not yet know what is possible.

CHAPTER ONE
LAYING THE LAND

WHAT IS PERFORMANCE ART? (WHERE IS PERFORMANCE ART?)

'It's like pornography.... I know it when I see it.' - Martha Wilson (performance artist and founder of Franklin Furnace, NY)[1]

'**PERFORMANCE ART IS PROPAGANDA. THE TRICK IS TO MAKE THIS MOVE PEOPLE AND AT THE SAME TIME BE GOOD ART.**' - Rachel Rosenthal (performance artist)[2]

'Everytime it happens it defines itself.' - Ellie Covan (performance artist and founder of Dixon Place, NY)[3]

'In a way performance art is convenient, the term is very convenient for me because if I say performance artist then people already have that idea of someone who uses a multiplicity of means, which is what I've always done.' - Meredith Monk (performance artist)[4]

'**Performance provides a safe space to negotiate differences - different ways of doing and saying and seeing. The relationship with audience is particularly heightened in that it is real time and real people.**'- Lois Keidan (live arts director, ICA)[5]

'Oh, my dear, it's very, very in.' - Ellen Stewart (founder of LaMama, NY)[6]

'**I THINK IT'S CONTINUALLY EVOLVING... USUALLY IT HAS AN EMOTIONAL BASE. IT'S EXCITING, IT'S RAW... IT'S ON THE CUTTING EDGE.**' - Stewart Gross (performance artist and choreographer)[7]

'People are as confused as ever about what it is.' - Scott McCauley (programme director of the Kitchen, NY)[8]

'**PERFORMANCE IS AN IMPOVERISHED COUNTRY, HOME TO THE UNKNOWN AND THE UNCODIFIED, A PLACE UNSUPPORTED BY POWERFUL MUSEUMS OR RICH COLLECTORS. THIS IS AN ART OF THE INVISIBLE.**' - C. Carr (performance art critic)[9]

'**PERFORMANCE IS A MEDIUM THAT DEFINES ITSELF. AS AN ART FORM, IT REPRESENTS NOTHING SO MUCH AS THE NEED OF THE CREATIVE ARTIST TO EXPRESS HIMSELF** *[sic]* **DIRECTLY TO THE AUDIENCE AND TO "TRY" HIMSELF IN PERFORMANCE. IT WILL CHANGE WITH ARTISTS' NEEDS.**' - Linda Frye Burnham (editor High Performance)[10]

'WHEN I STARTED HAVING SEX, I WASN'T A PERFORMER YET. BUT ALL THAT TIME, SEX WAS MY ART. I REALIZED IT LATER WHEN I MET A COUPLE OF PERFORMANCE ARTISTS. SOME GUY TOLD ME I WAS REALLY A PERFORMANCE ARTIST. I SAID, "WHAT'S THAT?" HE TOLD ME, BUT I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT HE SAID. TO ME, IT'S EXPERIMENTING WITH LIFE IN A FAIRLY ACCEPTABLE WAY.' - Annie Sprinkle (performance artist)[11]

'What is appropriately called performance art? Much of what I do I label performance because there's nothing better to call it. At this time, one definition of performance is "that which cannot be encompassed by other forms".' - Suzanne Lacy (performance artist)[12]

'I never had any idea of what it was, which is why I enjoy doing it so much.' - Laurie Anderson (performance artist)[13]

SURVEYING

This is what my body teaches me: first of all, be wary of names; they're nothing but social tools, rigid concepts, little cages of meaning assigned, as you know, to keep us from getting mixed up with each other, without which the Society of Cacapitalist Siphoning would collapse.

Hélène Cixous[14]

The attempt to define performance art, a practice premised on the undefinable as an overt resistance to categorisation, is a futile and frustrating exercise. Those who do it offer differing descriptions, those who write about it cannot decide on what it actually is, those who call themselves performance artists are called other things by other people (e.g. monologist, comedienne, storyteller, dancer...) while those who call themselves other things (e.g. monologist, comedienne, storyteller, dancer...) are called performance artists. Though the term has gained a common currency in art discourse (and in the USA even in popular discourse, through Jesse Helms' paradoxical gesture of promoting that which he sought to censor, by raising it into the public media space), it continues to defy any grounded categorisation.

A popular mechanism for containing the uncontainable is to construct it as an/in opposition to other, more (supposedly) easily definable practices. Performance art is performance art because it is not theatre... Yet can we be absolutely sure when theatre is theatre, and not 'performance art' or when dance is or is not performance art, or when a performance artist tells us an amusing story about her life whether she is a performance artist, a monologist or a comedienne? Can we any longer confidently demarcate the boundaries between artistic practices? 'Theatre' may have no words, consisting only of movement, visual and auditory landscapes. 'Dance' may contain the spoken word, while its movement is reduced to the everyday. The stand-up comic may appear in alternative art spaces, while the performance artist takes to the stage of large institutional theatres.

During a research period in America I spent time in a number of different spaces. each associated with different 'types' of performance events, and witnessed the same performers moving in and out of classifications. Penny Arcade appeared in a comedy line-up at the Knitting Factory, Dance Noise and performance artist Deb Margolin appeared in a comedy festival at PS122, Deb Margolin appeared at the Jewish Museum to perform extracts from a performance piece, Peggy Shaw appeared at an event at PS122 and performed in an off-Broadway show later that month, Carmelita Tropicana compered a show at Dixon Place and turned up in a film shown at a Festival of Short Women's Films, Patricia Hoffenbaum devised and directed a promenade show for the foyer of the NY Museum and then performed a solo extract from it at an 'underground' Soho gallery. The list goes on. These artists move between spaces, in and out of 'communities' and wear the various roles that each space/event places upon them.[15] Adopting a performative strategy, they become named in the process of the performance, either by the event they participate in or the space in which they perform.[16]

But what of the audience? Do they too shift strategically, following the (same) performers from venue to venue, irrespective of the 'type' of venue or the way in which the performer has been marketed? While conclusive evidence would obviously require extensive audience research, from my own observations (and personal experience) I would suggest that in some instances (my own, for example) this is the case. Having seen performance artist Penny Arcade previously at the CCA in Glasgow - a space associated with performance art - I followed her to New York's Knitting Factory, a venue known for its promotion of 'comedy'. Irrespective of where the performance was actually happening I attended the show expecting to see performance art.

While acknowledging the danger of fixing spectators into stable or closed categories and reducing them into an undifferentiated mass, I do think it is possible to

detect *general* (generalised, perhaps) audience make-up. The audience at the Knitting Factory seemed to be different from those (recurring) audiences I had encountered in other performance spaces, such as PS122, and Dixon Place. (Even in New York the faces become familiar after a while.) In distinction to what I can only describe as an 'arty' audience, the Knitting Factory audience appeared to be largely composed of twenty-something, heterosexual, 'trendily' dressed couples (although, admittedly, appearances can be deceiving).

While I am at risk of making huge assumptions,[17] I would suggest that the majority of these spectators were loyal Knitting Factory supporters, rather than Penny Arcade 'followers', and just as I expected to see performance art I assume they expected to see comedy. My own horizon of expectations was formed from my previous knowledge of the performer, while theirs was perhaps the result of previous knowledge of the venue. (Of course, their horizons may also have been expanded or altered by promotional and press materials. However, it is typical for each venue to market its 'products' with a 'house style', maintaining the image that the venue is aiming to promote.) Watching Penny Arcade (albeit in a 'comedy venue'), I saw a piece of performance art that was similar in style to the performance I had seen previously at the CCA. I wonder, though, what others saw? What *was* detectable was their laughter - although admittedly this was sometimes offered hesitantly.

This shifting between spaces is also evident in Britain. While Bobby Baker has been categorised as a performance artist (by some, monologist by others), in more recent years her work has been located within more identifiable 'theatre' spaces or organisations, such as LIFT (London International Festival Theatre). Similarly, Annie Griffin who previously positioned herself within 'theatre' discovered that the label 'performance art' generated greater acknowledgement - and perhaps 'understanding' -

for her work. (Griffin has recently swapped this title - and practice - for that of 'film-maker'.) Another area producing cross-overs within both Britain and the USA is that of 'club performance', with performance artists becoming club performers, and vice versa. Northern Irish performance artist Anne Seagrave has consistently presented her work within the gallery circuit, but recently, in collaboration with other artists, including sound artists, she has begun to show her work in club spaces, while Glasgow based club performance group, Mischief La Bas, recently performed their own performance piece. *Bull*, in the performance space Tramway.[18]

This shifting of performance art through various 'institutional' and 'categorical' boundaries perhaps signals the success of one of its aims. Rather than being located and fixed solely in resistance to the art market, the gallery system and other artistic forms, it produces and maintains a fluidity, actively moving through different - often assumed to be oppositional - spaces and practices.

Of course, this crossing over from one space to another, and the adoption of one label or another, may simply be a survival strategy. Avoiding being only one thing performers are able to promote their work in a wider variety of settings and to a greater number of audiences (in terms of both quantity and 'type'). In the increasingly shrinking world of arts funding the performer wishing to make a living from performance is often impelled to make herself as 'promotable' as possible to secure the widest range of financial support. By being strategically fluid, she can capitalise on as many opportunities as are available. She can also increase the exposure to her work, moving beyond what is perceived to be a relatively small band of performance art aficionados, by moving into other spaces.

My purpose in highlighting the fluid nature of the arts in contemporary Western society is to suggest that the binaries that opposed one art form against another are no

longer (if they ever were) sustainable. The practices bleed into each other, affecting changes on both sides, blurring the boundaries of each, and the other boundaries that exist at all the other edges. If the difference between one practice and another, between performance art and theatre, for example, is no longer guaranteed, can performance art be said to still *be*? As Simon Herbert states:

> No other medium has so forcefully resisted and denounced categorisation, whilst simultaneously being so utterly reliant on those very same categories to give it its identity.[19]

If these other categories are no longer securely fixed, then what marks performance art out as being different - against what is it forming its identity? While the critic writing about performance art has always faced the problem of definition, this problem has become increasingly acute since previously it was at least possible to write about what it was *not*. Now not only am I left feeling unsure about what exactly performance art is, I am also faced with the difficulty of determining whether there actually still *is* such a thing *as* performance art. The subject of my study - perhaps appropriately - keeps slipping through my fingers.

A common way out of this crisis of definition is to drop the 'art' from 'performance art' and utilise the singular term performance. I am uneasy about this. It seems too wide in scope. Theatre (?) is performance, dance (?) is performance, comedy (?) is performance. Moreover, the nomination 'performance' has itself become increasingly diversified. The steady proliferation of ideas within contemporary theory and other disciplines around 'performance' and 'performativity' destabilises the category 'performance', and its traditional link to 'theatre'. Language (discourse and theory), has been recognised as being 'performative', while gender has been defined by Judith Butler as a performative act. Such concepts have prompted a blurring of the previous

separation between theatrical performance and everyday performative gestures. (One can even return to the earlier sociological writings of Erving Goffman in the late 1950s to perceive such blurring between the everyday and the theatrical.) Additionally, the writings of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner examine links between everyday actions and theatre performances, nominating the former as performative rituals. Such events could be posited as 'cultural performances' in distinction to - but sharing certain devices with - 'aesthetic performances' (such as framing mechanisms of space, time and aims).[20] Using the word 'performance', then, provides no guarantee that we all share the same idea of what the field of 'performance' designates.

Another term currently in circulation is 'live art', which has the status of being somewhat interchangeable and closely associated with performance art, containing the same undecidability and stress on interdisciplinarity. However, I believe that the word 'live' (unintentionally perhaps) suggests the presence of the 'live' body within performance. As the technological realm increases there is a danger in this association, since it assumes that the 'live' is necessary to performance art, whereas 'liveness' has itself become an area of investigation within contemporary performance art, through explorations of the live/recorded, live/dead, human/machine binaries.[21]

It is noteworthy, however, that the event in Britain which has largely promoted the use of this term - the National Review of Live Art - itself shows a diversity of work, much of which contains no live bodies, for example installations and video art pieces. It would seem, then, that the term is something of a misnomer. While both performance art and live art suggest a fluidity I feel that 'performance' resists the association of 'liveness'. Furthermore, as suggested by Nick Kaye, performance art is perhaps more of a sub-category existing within live art - that is, while performance art may be an umbrella term used to loosely categorise a diverse number of performances, live art is another

umbrella term under which performance art sits.[22] If this is the case, then it is the sub-category that I am interested in studying here.

EARLIER ROADS

While the name 'performance art' seems to have proliferated and been subsumed into other categories since the late 1980s, it is impossible to pinpoint the exact moment at which the term 'performance art' came into existence. It is apparent, however, that as a 'practice' it did not appear suddenly, from nowhere, since many of the features presumed inherent to performance art were evident within much earlier art movements. Thus, it is possible to suggest that *some* (bearing in mind Fusco's criticism raised in the Introduction) of the Western precursors to performance art are the Futurist, Constructivist, Dadaist, Surrealist and Bauhaus movements in the early part of the twentieth century, all of which fed into multiple artistic activities in the second half of the century.[23] It has also been suggested that performance art borrows from the forms of entertainment prevalent in much earlier periods. Marvin Carlson posits mime artists, jugglers, rope-dancers, cabaret and circus acts as the not improbable precursors to contemporary performance art (I would also add 'freak shows' to this list). Carlson also suggests that the much repeated avant-gardist genealogy surely misses out other influences, such as the 'great twentieth-century monologue tradition in the United States', which could be seen to be of more relevance to the early performance art work of Whoopi Goldberg than the avant-garde movements were.[24]

In addition to these various avant-garde movements the more immediate art movements of the second half of this century bear an important relationship to performance art practices of the 1970s. This is not to suggest that there is a strictly teleological lineage throughout art history which will lead one to arrive at a conception

of performance art, for many of these practices overlap, borrow, and usurp in time, function, form and method. Moreover, in relation to Carlson's criticism above, while I am sure that performance art was undoubtedly influenced by more than just art movements I do believe that in the 1970s its most immediate link (at least in the USA) was to 'art', staged variously as reactions *against* the artistic hegemony.

An unavoidable problem presents itself in any attempt to chart shifts and developments in any practice, and this is all the more acute when exploring a practice whose function was to disrupt the social and artistic hegemony of the time. Historical mappings of the artistic experiments of this period continuously cite certain movements and within these movements, certain 'prime-movers'. This is a paradoxical gesture since many of these practices aimed to disturb the figure of the 'artistic genius' and the individual 'work of art'. Relying on historical documentation, however, it becomes impossible to avoid naming names, and thereby reinstating the 'genius' figure through continual repetition. Thus, artists such as John Cage, Allan Kaprow and George Maciunas take up godly positions, becoming the 'father figures' and progenitors of change.

I am uneasy with this 'star-status' history and provide the following caution: while these figures may be granted the privileged position of 'starters' of movements or artistic practices, there is no one, absolute start, as every change is dependent on an interrelation between past and present; the Happenings are perhaps as much a result of the Bauhaus school as of Allan Kaprow. Moreover, history is formulated on silences and exclusions, and the people named are perhaps done so at the cost of those who remain unnamed. This is not to deny that figures such as Kaprow played an important part in creating changes, but suggests that there are surely other people, playing equally important parts, who are absent from historical documentation (not least, of course,

women). 'History' is, itself, bound by its own social contexts and informing ideologies and discursive rules. Anaïs Nin perhaps provides an interesting example here in that, although associated with literature, she could be located as a precursor to women performance artists of the 1970s, as evidenced by her involvement with what were termed in her diaries as 'masquerades' - parties in which guests were asked to dress up in themed costumes. Describing a masquerade in 1953 in which participants were invited to come dressed as their madness, Nin writes:

> I wore a skin-colored leotard, leopard-fur earrings glued to the tips of my naked breasts, and a leopard-fur belt around my waist. Gil Henderson painted on my bare back a vivid jungle scene. I wore eyelashes two inches long. My hair was dusted gold with powder. My head was inside of a birdcage. From within the cage, through the open gate, I pulled out an endless roll of paper on which I had written lines from my books. The ticker tape of the unconscious. I unwound this and handed everyone a strip with a message.[25]

The similarity of this 'action' to Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*, analysed in Chapter 3, should not go unremarked. The 'body' of woman here depicts nature, untamed, reinscribing the association of 'woman' with 'animal' - a reinscription that in this instance, I would suggest, reads as being positive, valuing the link between them. The head of the woman, however, is trapped in a bird cage. Nin seems to be embodying the tension produced between these two states - the natural and the contained, the free and the captured, the body and mind split. If her writing is made to conform to the prescribed forms, then her freedom, her female form, is curtailed. Like Schneemann, Nin produces a text that comes from the inside to the outside - her unconscious becomes conscious. (Nin's focus on the unconscious, however, should be contextualised within the general interest in Freud's writing prevalent in the earlier part of this century.)

Another paradox presents itself when attempting to trace the history of an art practice that is live, temporal, and ephemeral. The records and photographic

documentation of such work freezes the intentionally momentary nature of it, giving it a static and frozen form that it deliberately sought to escape. The photograph of live art transforms it into 'dead art', and effectively turns it into something it never was. As the same photos are reproduced excessively because of their photogenicity - the 'soundbite' of the arts - a residue of performance art is deposited, creating a histomythography of the past.[26] The photos *become* the performance but are necessarily far removed from that real event which occurred in real time. And yet the photos and the writings are necessarily all that are left. In this sense, they are irresistible as they are our only means of touching the past, of knowing that it happened, of owning (ordering and interpreting) it. While acknowledging these attendant risks implicit to 'mapping' the past of performance art, I believe that in order to determine and account for any shifts occurring within women's engagement with this art 'form', such a (brief) mapping is necessary.

The 1930s to the late 1960s was a vibrant period of artistic experimentation in the United States of America. In the 1930s Duchamp was already challenging the hegemonic art world by producing his 'ready mades', in which everyday objects, being 'framed' by the gallery context, were transformed into objects of art. By the late 1940s the connection between the physical body and the work of art was being explored as painters turned away from the end product of the painting to explore the 'how' of painting, so that the *actions* of the painting body themselves became the art work. This focus on action was not, however, in direct opposition to the object of art. Instead, the action *was* the object, signalling an extension of - or divergence from - the challenges made to the art/life dichotomy, evident in the avant-garde movements of the turn of the century.[27] In 1953, after interviewing Jackson Pollock, critic Harold Rosenberg published an essay on 'The American Action Painters' in which he stated that:

> At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act - rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze or 'express' an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on canvas was not a picture but an event.[28]

The action painters ultimately sought to question the system that placed the object of the art over the action that produced the art. In relation to this, Henry M Sayre states that:

> Art is no longer that thing in which fully-fledged aesthetic experience is held perpetually present; art no longer transcends history, instead, it admits its historicity, its implication in time.[29]

In 1952 John Cage, influenced by the teaching he had received as a student at Black Mountain College (teaching informed by Bauhaus formalism and the conscious denial of illusionistic methods within art), presented a performance lacking in any linear, causal relationship which was largely unscripted and relied on the spontaneous input of the performers at one specific moment. Prior to the event, Cage presented a reading of the Huang Po Doctrine of Universal Mind, which stated that:

> Art should not be different [from] life but an action within life. Like all of life, with its accidents and chances and variety and disorder and only momentary beauty.[30]

At the same time as action-artists were staging artistic experiments, Cage was to have an impact on other artists with whom he came into contact - particularly Allan Kaprow, 'founder' of the Happenings. Kaprow extended expressionist painting beyond the picture frame into the exhibition space, this space then becoming itself a frame, an 'environment' for art. Wishing to move beyond space and time, Kaprow broke out of two and three dimensional work and introduced activities that occurred throughout the space. The 'actors' within the space did not perform roles but executed tasks, responding spontaneously to the environment and the activity being undertaken. Since the audience necessarily existed within the environment, they too were implicated within

the total work, the objective being to break down the barrier between life and art. As Kaprow stated, the 'line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible', and 'the source of themes, materials, actions, and the relationships between them are to be derived from any place or period except from the arts, their derivatives, and their milieu'.[31]

As Michael Kirby has noted, Happenings were compartmentalised events, alogical and nonmatrixed in form.[32] With the inclusion of the audience into the artistic event the Happenings denied their own autonomy while emphasising the essential role of the audience in the process of production. The actions contained within Happenings did not suggest one fixed meaning but could be interpreted on many personal levels with such meanings made and extracted by each viewer/participant. Moreover, locating the art work within time meant that the 'product' was purely temporal. Unlike the action artists who retained a product at the end of the process of painting, or a 'process-in-product', Happenings had no final 'product' which could be packaged and sold.[33]

Other artistic movements coined in the 1960s were Fluxus and Conceptualism. George Maciunas, suggesting that a name be given to the disparate activities springing up amongst down-town New York artists, chose the name Fluxus, a term with multiple meanings ranging from a fluid discharge to a flowing of energy across a surface, and to purge or flow freely. Fluxus artists, in much the same vein as those involved in Happenings, attempted to 'democratise' art by involving the spectator in both physical and intellectual interactions within the work. Fluxus events tended to be humorous and playful in their execution, ridiculing academic notions and traditions of art and taking up an oppositional relationship to the art establishment. Art was deemed to be for everyone and it could exist in the present moment, without anything extra. Thus, a dripping tap

was art, turning the radio up or down was art, 'life was art', with the life transformed into idiosyncratic material.

Some Fluxus artists also incorporated the written word into their work. In 1963, the manifesto for Concept Art, written by Henry Flynt, appeared in the Fluxus anthology. Flynt directed that:

> Concept art is first of all an art of which the material is concepts, just as the material of music, for example, is sound. Since concepts are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art for which the material is language.[34]

Concept art, in the tradition of Happenings and Fluxus, sought to decommodify the art object by emphasising the concept, the idea, over any finished product.

It could be argued that certain examples of these art forms, or movements, might be gathered under the general rubric of 'performance art' since all, to varying degrees, utilise the performing body within their execution. However, it is also apparent that 'performance art' has become perceived as being different from 'Happenings', 'Fluxus', and 'Conceptual Art', although these 'movements' (and those that preceded them) have been posited as the precursors to the term. Since, as stated, it remains impossible to determine a precise moment of divergence between these and performance art, it would be more appropriate to suggest that 'performance art' was the term given (retroactively) to a diverse number of artistic practices, which signified, if anything, the *degree* to which the live body became actively implicated in the work. Thus, in the work of Yves Klein, Valie Export and Yoko Ono, for example, the body becomes central to the presentation of the art, to the extent that the body *is* the art, that the art *is* performance.

I would also like to suggest, however, that although performance art may signify 'diversity', it is also possible to note other shifts within this diversity. Valie Export, in relation to the practices cited above, argues that the live body within such work was:

> for the painter only a painterly or, as the case may be, sculptural material [and as such] the body remained trapped in a state of nature and reduced to its natural functions. These stagings of the body followed rituals, myths, or painterly criteria.[35]

The marking of shifts *within* performance art, then, may be enabled by the questions 'what role does the body play within the work?' Is the body merely another object, used as part of an artistic practice, in the realisation of some concept, or does the body itself take on some other significance, as a lived, embodied body? Is the body perceived as being an artist's tool or canvas, or as being simultaneously the tool or the canvas *and* the object of enquiry? Is the body a generalised body or a personal body? Is the body a given body or a constructed body? While the 'function' of the body may be multiple, or may indeed bleed from one function to another, such questions perhaps allow the charting of differences both between and within the performance practices of, for example, Linda Montano (concept), Valie Export (embodied concept), Carolee Schneemann (personal body) and Annie Sprinkle (constructed personal body).

WHICH WAY NOW?

While it is impossible to provide a precise definition of what performance art is, many critics have delineated certain common features that were/are assumed to inhere in much of what is categorised as performance art (although in a moment, from the place of 1998, I will contest most of these). In relation to the brief history outlined above, it becomes apparent that many of them already existed in preceding art movements.

Perhaps the most frequently cited element within performance art was the break-down of the art/life boundary. It was suggested that in performance art there were no roles and no actors. The performance artist presented her/himself as they 'really' were. S/he actively confronted the audience, making an unmediated address. Secondly,

performance artists were said to be opposed to the commodification of art, with their choice of live performance resulting in an event which was seen to be temporal, unreproducible and unrepeatable and which could not, therefore, be bought or sold. Performances were frequently executed outwith traditional exhibition and gallery spaces and transported to more public arenas, therefore existing outwith the institutional and conventional contexts and support systems, resulting in more freedom of (re)presentation in the process. Thirdly, performance art placed emphasis on the process of work rather than the finished product, again resisting the notion of art as a commodity. Fourthly, the performance artist implicated the spectator in the performance by refusing to provide a closed narrative which the spectator could passively consume. There was no one 'story' or 'meaning' within a performance art piece, but a variety of sign-systems which converged, producing a multi-textual, multi-layered, non-matrixed 'script' from which the spectator had to extract or produce meanings as they specifically appeared or were suggested to her/him. However, it is important to note that although many of these features were presumed to be common to performance art there were *no* formal rules - something may have been called performance art and yet not adhered to all or any of the above features.

The view from the late 1990s looks somewhat different. First, the idea of the performer taking on no roles and presenting only her/himself has been contested within contemporary performance theory. Briefly, it has been argued that, on the one hand, it is impossible to fully know the self and therefore represent the self, and on the other, that the representation of this self is itself also problematised because it is inherently a re-presentation.[36] Secondly, it is now possible to suggest that there is a very definite 'performance art touring circuit' in the UK, encompassing the ICA, CCA, Arnolfini, The Green Room, Ferens, and the Chapter Arts Centre. Many performance art pieces are no

longer one-off events but now tour the country. (The same could be said of the U.S.A. as each city has its own 'alternative art' spaces). The majority of performances today tend to occur within these 'institutions', with performers either receiving a box office split or a flat fee.[37]

Increasingly, performance artists choose, or are pressured, into recording their work. Without such documentation it is unlikely that programmers will 'buy' in the performance. Performers are also increasingly beginning to produce spin-off merchandise, which can be purchased post-performance, for example in CD-ROM format, video format, documentation books, and audio cassette tapes.[38] Thirdly, because of the pressure to 'sell' their performances, I do not believe that it is necessarily the case that the focus within performance art remains placed on process as opposed to product. Of course, the live performance element of performance art obviously retains its 'non-object' art status, and in that sense it cannot be bought and taken away. However, spectators tend to buy a ticket on the understanding that they will see a 'finished' (that is, polished) piece - and as a result the emphasis seems to have shifted from 'artist' to 'performer', this shift indicating the expectation of a degree of performing skills. Only rarely do artists get the opportunity to undertake a residency where the actual process of creation can be observed, and even then, such residencies are usually followed by a showing of the completed 'product'.

One area in which the 'process' of the performance does continue to take precedence, however, is within what I would term 'installation performance art'. Here the event is a process that has no constructed 'ending', as such, and therefore lacks any notion of teleological progression. The performance is a temporal and contextual event, produced by the interaction of the performer's body with and in a specific space and time. Results cannot therefore be predicted beforehand but surface during the process.

In Janine Antoni's *Slumber* (1994), for example, the artist sleeps in the gallery, while a monitor records her rapid eye movements. During the day Antoni weaves a pattern of the printed graph of her REM into the fabric of a blanket. The line of the graph is made from strips of her night-dress, so that the dress becomes shorter as the installation progresses.[39] Similarly, in Rona Lee's durational piece, *Avid Metamorphosis I* (1995), the performer painstakingly unpicks a man's suit. In these examples the work consists of the ongoing relationships between bodies, space, time and spectators. The artist does not know, prior to performing the work, what will happen. Moreover, in such performances the temporal nature of the work prevents the spectator from ever seeing (consuming, owning) all of it. The spectator can only step into the process momentarily, and once s/he has left, the process continues. There is no ending, then, just a continuum of time and events. Such a strategy attempts to dissolve the notion of the work as a finished, completed product, instilling instead a sense of continuation, a continual 'becoming' but never arriving.

If I suggest, however, as I have above, that much of what was previously associated with the practice of performance art no longer applies to contemporary performance art, can I still posit such a thing *as* performance art? It is appropriate to turn here to critic Josette Féral and her engagement with this question in her article 'What is Left of Performance Art? Autopsy of a Function, Birth of a Genre'.[40]

Féral contends that performance art of the 1970s, as a practice, was determined by its function and that devoid of this function it no longer exists as a form but has become, instead, a genre. She writes that:

> The performances [of the 1970s] all had one and the same function: to contest the aesthetic order of the time. It is not surprising that performance art disappeared as a form when the function assigned to it was fulfilled. Which is what performance art seems to have accomplished.[41]

Féral locates performance art of this period as being modernist in approach and goes on to imply that, with the advent of postmodernism, the ideology contained within performance art has disappeared. This situation prompts Féral to write that:

> the disappearance of this ideology has affected performance art insofar as the latter lost in this evolution what had given it both its meaning and justification. Performance art today no longer has the same parameters as before because the stakes are not the same, nor are the theories underlying them.[42]

For Féral, performance art, without a function, loses its reason of being. It becomes merely one practice amongst many. Féral's title refers to the 'death' (and examination) of this function of performance art and while she cites the 'death' of performance art within this, she does also acknowledge that, in fact, performance art continues to exist and is 'even becoming institutionalized'.[43]

What is at issue, however, is that performance art, as it was known in the 1970s, is no longer. In contrast to earlier performance art, contemporary performance art is not, for Féral, a form specifically used to contest aesthetics, but a genre which can, 'like any genre, in turn perform several functions (for example, denunciation, ritual, discourse on the world and the self) - functions which the many artists engaged in it will not relinquish.'[44]

There is a suggestion contained within the end of this sentence that Féral considers this capacity of contemporary performance art to fulfil many functions as somehow 'debased', as less 'pure' than earlier performance art and this is a suggestion which runs throughout her article. Féral appears to be looking back at some Golden Age from a ruinous present. 'It took barely ten years for conditions to change, ten years for performance art to flower and 'die'.' Or, on the next page:

> Born out of a movement of protest against established values, which were those of an entire period (refusal of the notions of representation, rehearsal, and memory; refusal of a practice bereft of questioning and risk, as much for the artist as for the spectator), performance art reached its peak in the 1970s.[45]

For Féral, performance art, having no aesthetic order left to challenge, has simultaneously lost its (artistic) quality, becoming instead merely an 'expression of the self'.[46]

Again, there seems to be an implicit criticism within this, as if the 'proper' function of performance art should be restricted to questions of, and challenges to, 'art' (or theatre), and not directed towards 'subjectivity'. Féral's picture of 1990s performance art is bleak and is made so, I would suggest, by her positioning of it in opposition to some (imagined?) 'purer' form of an earlier performance art – that is, a modernist performance art. Féral seems closely aligned to critic Michael Fried, who also insisted on the 'purity' of form within art. According to Fried, only that which is essential to the work of art should be included in it as anything else approaches the theatrical and '*Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre.* [...] *What lies between the arts is theatre*'.[47] For Fried, what characterises 'advanced' (read 'modern') art is a critical self-reflective recognition of its own medium's specificity. Thus, the specificity of the medium of painting is its flatness, its two dimensionality – a property which is distinct to painting and which entirely differentiates it from other artistic mediums. Each new development in any art medium supposedly signifies a move towards the attainment of the purest form of that particular medium. As Nick Kaye asserts, 'The "modernist work" [...] is one that is anxious to define itself, that overcomes the work of the recent past in a projection towards "foundation", towards a revelation of its own unique and legitimating terms as art.'[48] Like the philosopher searching for the 'essence' of Being, the modernist artist self-consciously searches for the essence of

his/her particular art form. Modernist art, according to this reading, is not concerned with representation as such, but with the means of representation, that is, the 'nature of their own condition'.[49] Féral's dissatisfaction with contemporary performance art arises because such work extends beyond the frame of aesthetic concerns or quests.

While I do concur with much of Féral's noting of the shifts within performance art - as indicated by my own previous mapping - there are points at which I actively resist her conclusions. I wish to suggest instead that performance art has not disappeared, precisely because it has necessarily adapted to its changing context.

While it could be argued that performance art succeeded, along with other movements, in its aim of contesting the aesthetics of the 1950s onwards, and challenging institutional and formal practices, such challenges against 'form' continue today, although those challenges may be specific to the 1990s. Performance art persistently tests the boundaries of art. One need only witness the controversy stimulated by French performer Orlan, as she undertakes a series of plastic surgery over a seven year period - locating the operations within a frame of performance - to sense the points at which the boundaries of 'art' remain erected.[50] While artistic boundaries may shift they will still be present, in some form or another, and one continuing function of performance art is to continue to reveal/test/transgress the limits of such boundaries.

Admittedly, such art may not directly attack the 'art' as 'commodity' equation, but it is important to recognise that the challenges to boundaries implicitly enact a troubling of this equation. Framing definitions of what constitutes 'art' enact a regime of control which enables those who programme, distribute, critique, produce, or sell art to continue to create and regulate an art market - and a 'class' of art connoisseurs. Works which pass through the frames simultaneously challenge and destabilise them, making it difficult to calculate and impose value. The troubling of boundaries, then, is more than

just a transgression of 'taste' or 'acceptability', since it rocks the very foundations upon which the 'art market' is built.[51]

Furthermore, I would disagree with Féral's suggestion that performance art's singular aim in the 1970s was to contest the aesthetics of the time. Performance art has also often been concerned with contesting the world beyond that of art. As I will explore in the next chapter, many women used performance art in the 1970s as a form with which to embrace, practice or produce a feminist politics. 'Life' was often represented within performance art, lifting the practice beyond its formal concerns. Performance art has consistently been multiple in its attacks and oppositions. Féral herself seems to suggest as much when she insists that within the present era there are no longer any strong ideologies (*plural*) to contest - thereby implying that when there were, performance artists contested them.

This suggestion that there are no longer any ideologies left to contest is itself deeply troubling. While over-arching ideologies have undoubtedly been *contested* and problematised, they remain in circulation and it is against such ideologies that certain art practices continue to push. If there were really no ideologies, there would be no need, for example, for 'feminist' art.

Féral sets up an opposition between early and contemporary performance artists by locating the former as 'modern' and the latter as 'postmodern'. I wish, in this thesis, to avoid replaying the debate between modernism and postmodernism because even if one does accept that we are now in a 'postmodern age' (the age of 'late capitalism' or 'multi-national capitalism'), I am not convinced that labelling an art practice as one or the other is either useful or insightful. As there is no consensus as to what either of the terms actually means (even if this lack of consensus is itself held to be 'postmodern'), such labelling often reads as an empty gesture. This is not to say that an ongoing

engagement with the term 'postmodernism' has not been necessary for feminists, particularly around a negotiation over what 'postmodernism' is/means and its (positive and negative) relation to feminism and women. Such an engagement continues to be staged,[52] and is implicitly - if not explicitly - woven into the pages of this text.

While Féral appears to long for a 'modernism' now past, other critics celebrate (versions) of 'postmodernism' as the dawning of a more progressive cultural age. However, what both positions gloss over is that each term is unstable and internally divided and that to generalise about either is therefore to suppress shifts and internal differences. As Rita Felski notes in relation to the 'modern':

> Rather than identifying a stable set of attributes, 'modern' acts as a mobile and shifting category of classification that serves to structure, legitimize, and valorize varied and often competing perspectives. [...] Rather than inscribing a homogeneous cultural consensus, the discourses of modernity reveal multiple and conflicting responses to the processes of social change.[53]

Similarly, but in relation to postmodernism, Frederic Jameson writes that:

> As for *postmodernism* itself, I have not tried to systematize a usage or to impose any conveniently coherent thumbnail meaning, for the concept is not merely contested, it is also internally conflicted and contradictory. [...] *Postmodernism* is not something we can settle once and for all and then use with a clear conscience.[54]

While most critics would agree that the modern and the postmodern are relational, the latter necessarily occurring *within* the former (again raising the difficulty of making absolute distinctions), the terms of this relationship are often biased in favour of the postmodern. This bias, however, is itself dependent on positioning the 'modern' within a particular framework. Felski, after identifying the multiplicity of the modern, goes on to state her scepticism of writings which reduce the modern period to a 'particular and narrowly defined tradition of intellectual thought stretching from Kant to

Marx' which then enables the postmodern to appear as heterogeneous and ambiguous against a modern homogeneity. Felski astutely remarks that:

> Such a purported critique of totalization is itself vastly totalizing, doing interpretative violence to the complex and heterogeneous strands of modern culture, which cannot be reduced to exemplifications of a monolithic world-view in this way [...thereby] naively re-enacting the very logic of history as progress that it claims to renounce.[55]

Determining differences between a modern and a postmodern art practice does not offer a much clearer path of resolution between the terms. While `modernist` art strove towards a 'purity' of each art form, constituting `itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture', as Andreas Huyssen notes, this bridge between 'high' and 'low' art had already been challenged by the 'historical avantgarde`, for example Dada, Bauhaus and Futurism.[56] The historical avant-garde, then, is another face of modernist aesthetics, and I would suggest that the 'modern avant-garde', such as Happenings, Fluxus and Conceptualism, are related to this different modernism, rather than to a modernism directed towards attaining 'purity'.

Huyssen cites strategies of modernist art, stating that it is 'self-referential, self-conscious, frequently ironic, ambiguous and rigorously experimental'.[57] Adding to this list, Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi include other strategies such as montage, paradox, ambiguity and uncertainty, multiple narrative voices and non-coherent subject.[58] When confronted with such lists it is difficult to determine, in terms of aesthetic forms and approaches, whether contemporary (or indeed earlier) performance art is modern or postmodern. Moreover, what would either nomination specifically tell us? Such categorisation paradoxically erases differences in order to fit practices into concepts

which are, themselves, undecided - and in the case of 'postmodernism', deliberately so.

As Nick Kaye asserts:

> In seeking to describe the 'postmodern' in art and performance the critic attempts to characterise that which is disruptive of categories and categorisations and which finds its identity through an evasion or disruption of conventions.[59]

However, at the risk of producing my own generalisation, but forcing myself off the fence (into a corner?) in the process, I would suggest that a 'postmodernist practice' is one that does not ground itself in what Lyotard has termed 'grand narratives', in order to unquestioningly ascribe to, or prescribe, an already formulated vision of a 'better' future, itself grounded in unexamined assumptions about the 'unified subject' and 'universal progress'.[60] Within these terms, then, some of the performances I cite may be determined - in relation to their politics - to be variously 'postmodern'.

If one chooses to locate performance art of the late 1960s/early 1970s as modernist, then one *function* of performance art of the 1990s could be to challenge aspects of modernity, specifically the notions of knowledge, progress, truth, and the centrality of the subject. Féral herself concedes that while the *theory* of performance art (that is, performance art as a practice guided by a critique of dominant aesthetics) no longer provides the foundation of performance art, it is not without theory as this previous theory has been replaced by contemporary (postmodern) theory.

Finally, although I have some sympathy with Féral's suggestion that performance art has become a genre, I also think that the term 'genre' and its particular relation to performance art needs to be addressed. If by 'genre' Féral is indicating a recognisable - but broad - category of work, established through certain repetitions of form and employing certain conventions, then 'performance art' has perhaps become a genre. As a spectator in the 1990s, I have certain horizons of expectations produced by the term

'performance art'. With a history of over thirty years, this generic status of performance art is perhaps unavoidable. However, if part of my expectation of performance art is that it may contest the produced limits of its own practice, and therefore of its own generic conventions, then I cannot ever entirely predict what I will encounter - other than that it may be a contestation of the already known. The performance artist, working within the 'genre' of performance art, pushes against its boundaries, attempting to take it to unexpected places.

Moreover, while I agree with Féral's observation that performance art today has become a more institutionalised and 'familiar' practice than in the 1970s, I still maintain that it continues to lack strict boundaries, enabling it to extend its initial hybridised form (performance and art) into other hybrid relationships (performance art and dance, performance art and theatre, performance art and ritual, performance art and mediated performance, etc.). Within the 'performance art' genre, then, there are other generic forms being utilised simultaneously, which serves to destabilise (and perhaps question) both categories - performance art or dance? - as well as internal tensions, as evident in the use of autobiography within performance art - fact or fiction, performance or real?

Performance art, in spite - or even because - of its generic status continues to serve a vital purpose, indeed one of its founding purposes, as it transgresses or resists imposed limits, be they artistic or social. Resisting or transgressing its own generic conventions is, somewhat paradoxically, one of its generic functions.

CHAPTER 2
RE-PRESENTING AND RE-IMAGINING

Our lives have been transformed by the struggle of the margins to come into representation. Not just to be placed by the regime of some other, or imperializing eye but to reclaim some form of representation for themselves.

Stuart Hall[1]

CONTESTING THE CONTOURS

Understanding women's choice of performance art as a medium for artistic expression necessitates briefly locating the practice within its political and social context.

The late 1960s and early 1970s was a period marked significantly by social unrest which manifested itself in various organisations throughout the Western World, the impetus for which differed from country to country. In the USA the civil rights movement had been in existence since the 1950s, and continued to be a powerful force of opposition throughout the sixties, becoming more radical following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. Equally, the United States Forces involvement in the Vietnam War led to mass anti-war demonstrations throughout North America, resulting in a huge anti-war movement which joined together thousands of protesters in opposition to the military State. These two movements provided certain blue-prints for other disaffected groups of people who wished to challenge the inequality of American society, and the powerlessness that they felt in the face of dominant society. These included the student movement of 1968, the women's liberation movement, and the gay liberation movement.

What is noticeable about all of these movements is that their aim was not to overthrow an entire system. Instead, they were concerned with specific issues and

incidents of *power* - that is, the right of one group to hold power over another, whether that be white people over black, men over women, straight over gay, or imperialist countries over other countries. These were not organisations seeking to work together to challenge and transform the capitalist system *per se*, but were individual groups working on more localised levels of politics and personal or social relationships, challenging the prevailing hierarchies that relegated persons to positions of dominant/submissive, powerful/weak.

In contrast to the USA, the social upheaval in Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s was more directly linked to the historically strong presence of other organisations of the Left, ranging from the Communist Party, Trotskyism, neo-Trotskyism (International Socialism), Libertarian Marxism and the New Left which spanned the Post War years. Thus, while there were also student revolts and the formation of the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, such groups were part of the flux of already evident 'revolutionary' ideologies which were pushing for complete systemic change.[2]

While there are many similarities between the feminist movements of Britain and the USA, there are also differences which, I would suggest, are related to the different political ideologies and histories in operation in both countries. While the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain was largely aligned to and based on Marxist politics, its specific contribution to the general Left movement was that it sought to identify and fill a gap in Marxist theory - namely, the unaccounted-for position of women. Particular focus was placed on the role women played in the reproduction of both the next generation of the workforce, and the maintenance of the present one. Such work was recognised by feminists as being invisible, unpaid and yet crucial to the overall workings of a capitalist economy.

As the feminist movement was part of a larger Left movement its aim was also to contribute to complete social change - with 'complete' extending to women. It is important to recognise, however, that while the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain had many links to other Left organisations, and many of its members were also members of other groups, it was seen to be an *autonomous* movement with such autonomy being considered as crucial to its success. While other 'Left' organisations may have perceived this as divisive, the feminist movement realised that many women were subordinated within groups which were supposedly sensitive to women's equality, and that any fight against male domination had to be done by and for women themselves. Equally, the women's movement avoided what Lynne Segal terms *stageism* - the idea that women's liberation could wait until the liberation of the working-class.[3]

In the USA, by contrast, the ideology circulating around various political organisations was linked to the historical 'American Dream', and the rights of each individual to (be able to) achieve their 'dream'. Women were specifically confronted with the contradiction implicit in 'American values' and the 'traditional woman's role'. On the one hand, the focus was on achievement and individualism, while on the other it was on supportiveness, nurturance, and caring. The demands of the 'feminine' and the 'American' were blatantly at odds and the two were not easily compatible. The feminist movement in America, then, concentrated on the rights of women within the *present* society. The aim was not to change the world so much as to improve women's place within that world.[4]

Of major importance to the Women's Liberation Movement, both in Britain and the USA, was that its political ideology related directly to the real lives of women. All analyses of women's situations came out of women's experiences, many of which were raised and discussed within small localised women's groups (which tended to be

comprised of white, middle-class women). These 'consciousness raising' groups provided a 'safe' environment for exploration and resulted in women sharing common experiences of oppression and realising that the situations they each described were not individual, but *social*, resulting from present social conditions. Such an awareness 'shifts the attention away from one's own inadequacies towards finding the real causes of these problems and gives a perspective that can lead to action'.[5]

The 'personal' became the 'political', and in the process multifarious areas of women's lives were explored, many of which had previously been hidden or denied, including marriage, housework, motherhood, female sexuality, female employment and unemployment, women's representation in media, and women's education.[6]

DRAWING OTHER LINES

Politics and spectacle have had a long history within feminism. Perceiving themselves as an invisible sector of society, one way to force the dominant society to take notice of them, to make them notice, is for women to turn themselves into spectacles that are remarkably different from the everyday ones. In relation to this, Loren Kruger states that:

> There is a saying that women have always made spectacles of themselves. However, it has been only recently, and intermittently, that women have made spectacles themselves. On this difference turns the ambiguous identity of a feminist theatre.[7]

Responding to this, I would suggest that the 'spectacular' actions undertaken by feminists deliberately fuse the gap between the two spectacles - the spectacle is both a spectacle of themselves *and* by themselves. This tactic shares links with the performance art strategy of turning the body into art - and here too the body becomes political, offering another rendering of the 'body politic'.

Early examples of this strategy of collapsing the 'of' and 'for' into one another include the British suffragettes chaining themselves to railings, staging symbolic demonstrations and, in what could be seen as a precursive performance art piece, Constance Lytton's attempt during her imprisonment to inscribe the words 'Votes for Women' into her own flesh. The demand, scratched onto her skin with a needle, began over her heart and was intended to finish on her face.

More recent 'spectacular' feminist events include the Women's Liberation marches in the 1970s, in which participating women made giant sculptures of tampons and the 1970 demonstration in Britain against the Miss World contest, which culminated in the arrest of a number of those who participated. During the event at the Albert Hall, women stormed the stage, threw smoke bombs, flour, stink bombs, leaflets, blew whistles and waved rattles.[8]

In a similar vein to the British anti-Miss World agitation, in 1968 the Miss America Pageant was criticised by feminists for being an event that symbolised Americans' preoccupation with a woman's appearance. Symbolically, feminists threw away different items of clothing which they deemed to be uncomfortable but which were seen as necessary for achieving the correct, 'attractive' image of womanhood, including girdles, high-heeled shoes and bras. 'The media, seeing a good news story, highlighted their "unfeminine" "bra-burning" activities. In fact no bras were burned...'[9]

While both these actions could be seen to anticipate women's use of performance art for political expression, the historical mapping of women's actual engagement with performance art as a 'distinct form' is problematised by the fact that the roots of that engagement in Britain and the USA (like the political ideologies circulating in both countries) are distinctly different from each other. In the latter, performance art achieved a certain recognition, becoming acknowledged as a 'radical' art form, at approximately

the same time as the Women's Liberation Movement was gaining in momentum. It was therefore both immediately available to, and offered great potential for, feminist artists - a point I shall expand later. Additionally, many of the women turning to (or developing) performance art as a medium of expression had previously been involved in those other artistic movements and experiments which are hailed as some of performance art's forerunners. It is probable, then, that performance art was being practised by women before it had even been named.

As explored in the previous chapter, one of performance art's aims was to challenge the 'art world', both in terms of 'form' and in terms of the commodification of the art object. As such, performance art was perceived as being distinct from theatre since it was seen to be mainly concerned with a politics of aesthetics. Many women performance artists, however, while acknowledging that performance art was an 'art' form, appropriated the form to engage in broader political issues - which included resisting and challenging the hegemonic male art world, but ultimately went beyond that by examining the representation of women in general.

The 'story' in Britain is somewhat different since performance art did not begin to make any recognisable impact here until the late 1970s.[10] The experimental forms, such as Happenings, Fluxus, and the Conceptual Art Movement were largely American 'products' (although other European countries had their own avant-garde traditions). Feminists in Britain who wished to produce feminist inspired representations of women often did so from within their own social and cultural context (a context informed by - although separate from - the Left movements in Britain), adapting to their own needs one of the prevalent models of alternative representation available in Britain at that time - political theatre.[11]

In the early 1960s a proliferating number of theatre groups with socialist aims were formed, including CAST (Cartoon Archetypical Slogan Theatre), The AgitProp Street Players, Red Ladder, Joint Stock, 7:84, Belt and Braces, and Gay Sweatshop, all of which were 'collectives'.[12] Mirroring the general movement of women leaving Leftist groups many of these theatre companies also fractionalised in the 1970s as women (and some men) split off to form groups that specifically addressed the issues of feminism (and gender). For example, company members left Belt and Braces to form The Monstrous Regiment in 1975, and other companies, such as the Women's Theatre Group (1974), and Mrs Worthington's Daughters (1978), were comprised of members who had previously worked in other mixed gender, socialist theatre groups.

While retaining the collaborative model, these newly formed groups - members of which had previously experienced the potential 'take over' of former collaborative companies by one member (usually a man) - also worked co-operatively. There was no hierarchical structure and everyone's contribution was treated as equal.

The cross-over between members of socialist and feminist companies also resulted in shared presentational styles. Thus, the early agitprop forms used by the Women's Street Theatre Group were increasingly replaced by socialist realist forms (following Red Ladder's first 'feminist play' in 1974 *Strike While the Iron is Hot*).[13] The Women's Theatre Group's initial performances, for example, were predominantly 'issue based' plays, looking at areas such as 'women's work', and contraception.[14]

However, it is also apparent that by the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s a degree of theatrical experimentation was being undertaken by a number of companies. Siren Theatre Company blended punk music and culture into their 'lesbian' shows in the late 1970s. Monstrous Regiment presented European experimental shows, such as Franca Rame and Dario Fo's work, and the Women's Theatre Group began doing more

stylistically challenging pieces, such as Deborah Levy's *Pax* (1985). Additionally, more physical/visual performance theatre companies such as Tattycoram and Bloodgroup were representative of a new type of feminist performance theatre that was beginning to provide an alternative to the agitprop or social realist performances of earlier feminist groups. [15]

Bloodgroup's first performance, *A Barricade of Flowers* (1981), reveals the non-text based and fluid nature of its form, with its mixing and merging of images and physical movement:

> *Barricade of Flowers* starts with the two performers, faces and hair whitened as to be almost identical, gently see-sawing on a giant pink see-saw. They are linked throughout by a scarlet satin umbilical cord, a physical connection that seems to negate verbal communication, their vocal exchanges are reduced to the barest twitterings and chantings.
>
> Images tumble over each other; the see-saw becomes a table for a feast of La Grande Bouffe dimensions, each slyly watching the other to see how much is devoured, a silver fish is whisked from between a madonna's thighs, a fridge is opened, grail-like for worship at the shrine; all the senses are assaulted by colour, sound, smell.[16]

Bloodgroup's next show, *Dirt* (1983), seems to anticipate the contemporary fascination with the concept of the performative. Exploring 'performance - the sex of theatre and the theatre of sex', *Dirt* considers the relationship between women theatre performers and women who perform in bed and on the streets. Publicity material for the performance reads:

> Composed as a series of 'acts', the piece revolves around the building and breaking of fetishistic images. Disguises of femininity are assumed and discarded, creating a landscape of clichés disturbed by incongruity. Action is interrupted by other media, returning constantly to the theme of women's function as performers in art and life.[17]

Interestingly, Stella Hall, reviewing the piece, writes that:

> The need to express a 'correct' viewpoint in terms of the women's movement was important, but within it were many conflicting attitudes. The material was dense, contentious, the desire to use new media at times got in the way of a clear expression.[18]

Bloodgroup, then, are in obvious ways related to more contemporary performance artists such as Annie Sprinkle. For example, Hall writes that 'Through a series of connected, and often disconnected, "acts" *Dirt* explores the "pure" and "impure" in woman'.[19] The group also showed an awareness of the presence of the spectator, and the dynamics between spectator and performer, including the 'desire' of the spectator, and the blurring between the 'real' and the 'fictional'. As the performers change on stage, in view of the audience, a slide suddenly announces WE KNOW YOU ARE LOOKING. Hall's reaction is telling:

> Should we be? Shouldn't we be? After all, they are performing. Or aren't they? Is this some kind of interval? No they're talking now. But to each other! What about us? We're here too. Eavesdropping on the backstage chat, but they're not backstage ...
>
> Bloodgroup constantly set up and knockdown our notions of what is and isn't performance in the theatrical sense.[20]

Experimentation with representational forms was not limited to feminist theatre co-operatives. By the early 1980s it is evident that there was a proliferation of what could be more 'properly' called feminist performance art. *Performance* magazine's listings in the 1980s is instructive in respect of the burgeoning number of women using non-traditional, performance art 'forms'. Listings for April/May 1983, for example, included the First Dartington Festival of Performance Art & Visual Theatre, with invited artists such as Shirley Cameron, Rose English and Anna Furze. The Air Gallery in London was showing work by New York video artists Ellen and Lynda Kahn. At the Chisendale Dance Space there was a week long event entitled 'Dance Talks: Dead

Centre or Live Art', consisting of events, workshops, conferences, performances and parties. The Oval House presented Siren Theatre Company's performance *From the Divine*, while in Newcastle Sandra Elear and Robyn Hutt's performance 'deal[t] with sexual politics, researched from visits to leather bars, gay bars and sex shops in the US'. and in Nottingham Bloodgroup presented *Dirt*.[21]

What is also apparent from such listings is that Britain in the 1980s had a vibrantly mixed and experimental performance circuit, encompassing various companies. styles and individuals. Alongside listings of the WTG, Siren and Monstrous Regiment are performance companies Bloodgroup and Cunning Stunts, as well as solo performers such as Anne Seagrave and Fiona Templeton (both of whom continue to perform today). Somewhat in distinction to performance art in the USA, women's performance art in Britain seems to have had close links to various 'alternative' theatre forms, sharing a more symbiotic relationship with them.

A striking and recurring feature of performance art (noticeable in the above Listings) that needs remarking here, in terms of its relation to feminism, is that it is frequently created and performed by a single performer. For feminists in the 1970s in America a probable tension is produced between two different ideological systems - the feminist movement with its stress on co-operative and collaborative work, and the performance art 'movement', with its emphasis on the body of the solo performer. Such a split is reflected in the work of American female performance artists. For instance, Suzanne Lacy and Judy Chicago frequently staged collaborative works, such as *The Dinner Party* (1979) and *Three Weeks in May* (1977), while performance groups such as The Waitresses worked co-operatively as a team. However, alongside this feminist model, there is evidence of many solo performances such as those by Carolee Schneemann (*Up to and Including Her Limits*, 1973 - 76), Laurie Anderson (*For*

Instants, 1976), Barbara Smith (*Feed Me*, 1973), and Bonnie Sherk (*Public Lunch*, 1971).

In Britain, meanwhile, although collaborative and co-operative working methods were prevalent during the 1970s, from the 1980s onwards there is a marked increase in solo work. One way to circumvent this apparent contradiction of the feminist solo performer was to produce or promote solo work under a collective banner, as evidenced by Women's Distribution - 'six new performances by seven women, including Women in Performance, led by Susan Hiller', and the Nottingham Feminist Art Group.[22] However, I would also suggest that the shift towards solo work in Britain in the 1980s was not in as contradictory a relationship to feminism as that solo work produced in the USA during the 1970s; by the 1980s the ideology of feminism had itself begun to shift and splinter as the issue of 'difference' increasingly asserted itself within the movement.

My remarking of this increase in solo work is not intended to deny the continued existence of other models. Suzanne Lacy, for example, continues to produce collective feminist performance work and at the 1996 National Review of Live Art, Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante presented their collaborative performance *Stuff*.

Another noteworthy performance form reliant on collaboration and collective participation which continues to be an important contemporary political tool is the 'spectacular demonstration', used by both feminist and 'queer' activists. The performance aspect implicit to such demonstrations suggests a strong link to performance art.[23] In 1982, for example, the Greenham Common Women staged a 'circle' of women around the perimeter fence of the Greenham nuclear weapons base. This action served both to make a visual political statement and to produce a feeling of solidarity and support between the women who participated. Each woman was asked to

bring something personal to decorate the perimeter fence - 'anything related to real life as opposed to the unreal world the military base represents.'[24]

The Lesbian Avengers have also successfully embraced the concept of using public spectacle as a means to force home a political message. The Avengers are well-known for their publicly staged actions, and indeed it is such actions that have ensured the visibility of the group and the messages that they wish to disseminate. Their first action (staged in New York) was directed at the Queens district anti-gay stance against the recently proposed multicultural curriculum. 50 Lesbian Avengers, wearing t-shirts with the slogan 'I Was A Lesbian Child', and carrying 300 lavender balloons with 'Ask About Lesbian Lives' printed on them, walked half a mile to a school in the Queens district, accompanied by a marching band playing 'We Are Family'. At the school gate, each child was given a balloon. Founding member of Lesbian Avengers, Sarah Schulman, writes of the event:

> Every child who attended school that day heard the word 'lesbian', and for some it just might have been the most important day of their lives. It certainly forced the teachers to discuss the existence of lesbians, regardless of what restrictions had been placed on them by Mary Cummins, the bigoted chair of the local school board.[25]

While such examples indicate the continuing existence of collaborative and co-operative performance work, the shift that I am noting here is one that specifically occurs within the feminist performance art movement. Thus, although acknowledging these examples, I would suggest that there has been a *general* move from a mix of feminist collaborative-co-operative work and solo work in the early 1970s (with emphasis definitely placed on the former in Britain) to more predominantly solo performances today in both countries. In America, the female performance artists that are most widely recognised are all solo - Laurie Anderson, Karen Finley, Rachel Rosenthal, Annie

Sprinkle, Holly Hughes, Carmelita Tropicana. In Britain, too, it is apparent that the number of feminist performance collectives has all but disappeared while solo artists seem to be more visible (although not in the same 'famous' way as in America - Bobby Baker is perhaps the closest 'star' Britain has). Attending seasons of 'women's performance art' that have been programmed in Britain in the past five years it is notable that the majority of the performances presented are by solo artists - be they European or American.[26]

This shift is one that remains in need of explaining and I would suggest that there are a number of contributing factors that could account for it. First, the documented history of performance art itself is mainly a history of solo performance artists as reflected by the names most frequently cited: Chris Burden, Bruce Nauman, Carolee Schneemann, Linda Montano, Paul Cos, Eleanor Antin, Paul McCarthy, Rachel Rosenthal, etc.[27] While feminism in the 1970s stressed the need to create 'communities' of support, or a 'community' of women, female artists using performance art either contributed to or 'inherited' its solo nature. Prior to the naming of 'performance art', Schneemann, Marina Abramovic, Yoko Ono, and Linda Montano, for example, were all doing 'solo' work (although admittedly all also undertook collaborative performances, particularly in the case of Abramovic and Ulay).

Secondly, performing solo requires the least amount of financial support. All that is required is the performer's body. As funding has become increasingly scarce, the solo performance remains one of the most viable forms for artists, and one of the cheapest products for venues to buy in.

Thirdly - and related to the previous point - by the mid-1980s and into the 1990s as performance art has become somewhat recommodified (a 'live object' in circulation on the 'art/performance circuit') - its conditions of production have necessarily shifted.

As a 'commodity' (a status partly conferred upon it by artists wishing to make a living from their art, and programmers wishing to raise money from their programming). performance art increasingly approaches the conditions of theatre - it becomes rehearsed, repeated and toured. Moving into the theatrical frame requires that performance art adopts some of the same economic concerns as theatre, particularly those relating to finance and marketing (which are of course interrelated) - who is this for, how are they targeted? In relation to these newly established conditions of production it is easier to promote a solo performer since there is already a known and recognisable 'star performance art circuit' with identifiable performers whose work regularly sells out.[28]

Fourthly, as feminist politics have become more fragmented and differentiated it is politically imperative that one does not seem to be speaking for all women. An inherent danger with collaborative or co-operative work is that all those involved agree on a 'party line' and differences become subsumed to the general 'theme' of the performance. The contemporary solo performer is less likely, perhaps, to attempt to tell the story of 'women', concentrating only on her own, specific story. The solo performance, then, lends itself well to (and mirrors) the shift within the feminist movement from the notion that women are all the same, to the notion that women are all different.

Finally, the solo performer has greater control over the work made and does not have to compromise to fit in with a group's perceived needs. The solo performer is more autonomous and freer to perform what and how she wants (although she is of course constrained by other external factors).

Since contemporary women's performance art is most frequently created by solo artists my focus will necessarily rest mainly on solo performances. Equally, as early examples of performance art seem more prevalent in the USA than in Britain, my survey

of earlier solo performances - by way of contrast to more recent work - will be reliant on the (more widely available) historical documentation of these American performances.[29]

VARIOUS SITES

Female artists joining the Women's Liberation Movement in the USA (or impacted by it), were aware of the male bias operating within artistic institutions which marginalised their own work. The problems faced by female artists were twofold - first, their work had to be like 'male' work if it was to be understood and acknowledged within the artistic institutions. Secondly, even if it was acknowledged, it was treated as suspect, as not worthy of serious consideration. As Judy Chicago states:

> When I was twenty-three, I was an up-and-coming young artist and so were a number of other women. As I went along, there were less and less women. As I started getting better and the careers of most of my male peers were going up, mine was sort of staying at the same place. I found I could get somebody to respond to *one* work; they'd think that *one* was fantastic and I'd get a whole lot of feedback. But no comprehension of my work in terms of a whole series of ideas. I began to realize that a woman can do a single thing - that's sort of an accident; but if she makes a coherent body of work that means she has to be taken seriously in terms of ideas, and that moves into another place in the art world.[30]

As a result of the difficulties faced by female artists a strategy that was frequently utilised was the construction of alternative networks for the viewing of women's work which operated outwith traditional institutions. Of course, there is a difficulty inherent to this strategy. The creation of a separate realm for women artists simultaneously relegated them to something of a ghetto status, while leaving intact the hegemonic (male) opinion that women's art was not worthy of serious consideration precisely because it was by women.

Aware of the problems intrinsic to separatist spaces, many women created a 'woman only' (safe) space in which to make the work, but then invited both women and

men to view it when a mixed audience was deemed to be appropriate. In these instances the strategy was multiple: to provide spaces in which women would be actively encouraged to make and display art works, to encourage female spectatorship and criticism, and to enable male spectators to engage with the work and recognise its value.

A noteworthy example of this strategy was the Feminist Art Program at Fresno State in 1970, where women had both the facilities to explore their own artistic expression and the autonomy to decide how and to whom such work should be shown. Within this Program, various art forms were utilised as mediums to excavate experiences. According to Chicago, the women utilised their real life experiences in their artistic productions to:

> work out their own experiences, to see how the personal *was* political, to analyse their own lives in the light of a feminist perspective... Women worked collectively, learned new skills (male skills), explored traditional women's skills and aimed at opening up their whole range of emotions for creative work... to link the public with the private in our schizoid world, to embrace the whole of life.[31]

Under the feminist slogan of 'the personal is the political' (inspired by consciousness raising groups), life, art and politics were able to be effectively joined. In 1971, Chicago and a number of her students, including Faith Wilding and Suzanne Lacy, moved to Los Angeles, where Chicago and Miriam Schapiro organised the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts). Allan Kaprow had already begun teaching at Cal Arts and his incorporation of ritualistic elements into Happenings lent themselves particularly well to women now looking at personal aspects of their lives and seeking ways to transform them into the foundations of artistic presentation.

In 1971, Womanhouse was created - a run-down mansion in Los Angeles which the Cal Arts Feminist Arts Program transformed into an artistic space. Chicago writes of this space:

Our environment reflected our values, the ones this society encourages women to adopt: openness, vulnerability, caring for others, and placing the needs of people above the rigid rules of institutions or academic disciplines. One might ask: Aren't you just prolonging women's oppression by being what society has made us? The answer to that was clear to all of us. It seems to me that growth takes place by starting where we really are and moving on. We women have spent much of our time hiding who we are, because we have been made to feel ashamed.[32]

In 1973, alongside the Feminist Arts Program at Cal Arts, Chicago formed the separatist Feminist Studio Workshop. At the same time, Womanspace (a woman's gallery) was founded, and by the end of the year the Women's Building opened, housing both the Workshop, Womanspace, and a further two women's galleries.

Within their own spaces women had the freedom to explore areas that were previously deemed to be 'unsuitable' artistic subjects. Just as the consciousness-raising groups had enabled women to talk about areas that had previously been hidden, so the women's art groups allowed female artists to explore those areas that had previously been invisible or denied, and to do so in forms that had previously been disregarded or ignored. As Chicago states:

> Although many women in the arts have struggled to give voice to their experiences as women, their forms, like mine, have been so transposed (into the language of sophisticated artmaking) that the context could be ignored by a culture that doesn't understand or accept the simplest fact of women's lives, much less subtle and transformed imagery.[33]

In the Womanhouse, for example, a total environment was created which explored different facets of being a woman:

> In the kitchen a progression of sculptured breasts turned gradually into fried eggs; one bathroom contained a mass of Tampax, another an excessive collection of makeup; and if you opened the linen closet you found a trapped mannequin.[34]

In addition to these sculptural art pieces, live performances were programmed, each again looking at very specific areas of women's lives and their relationships to society.

For instance, Faith Wilding presented *Waiting*, a piece charting the life-cycle of a woman from birth to death, the entire journey of which is punctuated only by the passive (non)act of waiting:

> Waiting...waiting...waiting
> Waiting for someone to come in
> Waiting for someone to pick me up
> Waiting for someone to hold me
> Waiting for someone to feed me
> Waiting for someone to change my diaper. Waiting...

This litany continues to trace the stages of the woman's life, travelling through childhood, adolescence, marriage, childbirth, menopause, until finally:

> Waiting for the mirror to tell me I'm old,
> Waiting for release
> Waiting for morning
> Waiting for the end of the day
> Waiting for sleep. Waiting...[35]

Further performances highlighted the importance of women's real experiences to the presentation of these pieces. Sandra Orgel ironed a tablecloth 'quietly, devotedly, obsessively' in *Ironing*, while Chris Rush scrubbed the floor in another performance called *Scrubbing*.

It is hard to describe the pieces shown in Womanhouse as anything other than examples of feminist art - art that depicts women's experiences in a critical light, in the hope that such revelation will produce change. However, an interesting response to this interpretation is offered by Suzanne Lacy who asserts that much of women's creative work during this period was overladen with feminist interpretations which were perhaps not implicit in the works of art themselves. For Lacy, while Kaprow had earlier explored ritualistic forms inherent in everyday life through the repetition of mundane activities, when women conducted this same exploration through ritualistic presentations of *their*

everyday, the secular experiences and the ritualistic elements were subsumed under interpretations that perceived the work to be a purely feminist and political protest. That is, these performances were not perceived as *ritual* enactments of the 'everyday' but as feminist statements concerning the drudgery of women's lives.[36]

While I think it is vitally important to recognise that these pieces were *artistic*, aiming to challenge the dominant aesthetics of the time (as outlined in the previous chapter), and were not therefore only 'political spectacles',[37] I think it would also be wrong to ignore or disavow the fact that the activities that the women presented were those activities which were singularly applicable to *women*, unlike certain activities that featured in Kaprow's work which were gender-neutral.[38] Tooth-brushing might be a mundane activity but it does not hold the same gender-stratified implications that activities such as scrubbing or ironing do. While these activities may well be perceived as 'rituals', within the context of the rising women's liberation movement - and situated physically within Womanhouse - they cannot help but be rituals loaded with significance. Moreover, though revealing hidden aspects of everyday life, the fact that these are the everyday lives of *women* is surely crucial to their interpretation and part of any exploration of their ritual form. The actual scrubbing of *Scrubbing* necessarily takes on other meanings, connoting women's subservient place in society, women's role as a domestic servant cleaning up after others, woman as literal *scrubber*, woman as isolated individual, woman on her hands and knees.

Lacy's point, however, is important in that it acknowledges that while artists may *intend* certain readings, any final meaning ultimately resides with the person who reads the text. As Keir Elam states, 'Every spectator's interpretation of the text is in effect a new *construction* of it according to the cultural and ideological disposition of the subject.'[39] There is not one single message conveyed in a performance text, but multiple

messages, and multiple interpretations, over which, ultimately, the creator of the piece has no *absolute* control. Although some performers may choose to determine the meanings of performance beforehand, there is always a certain amount of *indeterminacy*, since meaning is always relational, shifting, and never immediately *present* - a situation which is often deliberately capitalised on within performance art practice, as the 'meaning' is not imposed by the performer but left to be 'read' or 'made' by the spectator.[40] Similarly, a performer may often wish, themselves, to arrive at a meaning *during* the act of performance rather than prior to it. In these instances, it is in the undertaking of the performance that the 'meanings' surface.

In both the Feminist Art Programs at Fresno and Cal Arts, performance was used as a means for exploring the hidden lives of women because, as Chicago states:

> Performance can be fuelled by rage in a way painting and sculpture can't. The women...did performances with almost no skills, but they were powerful performances because they came out of authentic feelings. [41]

One of the distinct advantages of performance art is that it is a *live* art, and as such directly confronts the spectators who witness it, viscerally challenging the concept of the purely 'formalist', or distanced, aesthetic response. The performer and the spectator share temporal and physical space, both are present within it, and the safety afforded by distance, or the security felt by the active spectating subject in relation to the passive displayed object, is no longer guaranteed.

As women are (most) frequently represented as 'objects' within art, positioned for consumption by a (male) spectator, the live presence of the performer affords an opportunity to reveal or actively confront and challenge such a relationship. As Catherine Elwes writes:

> [performance] denies voyeurism its safe dénouements leaving a man exposed to the fearful proximity of the performer and the dangerous consequences of his own desires. His cloak of invisibility has been stripped away and his spectatorship becomes an issue within the work.[42]

An attempted literalisation of the stripping away of this invisibility is revealed in Valie Export's performance *Genital Panic* (Munich, 1969). Wearing black trousers with the crotch piece cut out, Export enters a cinema that is showing pornographic films. A gun is slung over her shoulder. She announces that 'real' genitalia is available and they can do whatever they wish to it.

> I moved down each row slowly, facing people. I did not want to move in an erotic way. As I walked down each row, the gun I carried pointed at the heads of the people in the row behind. I was afraid and had no idea what the people would do. As I moved from row to row, each row of people silently got up and left the theatre.[43]

Export suggests that, 'Out of film context, it was a totally different way for them to connect with the particular erotic symbol.'[44] Confronted with the real, live genitalia of a woman, it is possible that spectators in the auditorium were unable to maintain a distance which would allow for successful fetishistic scopophilia and voyeurism. Moreover, the female looking back destroyed the passivity of the 'object' to-be-looked-at. On another level, however, the fact that Export had a gun presumably had a huge impact on the reaction of the audience. The gun, a phallic substitute, facilitated a reversal of the power balance between man/woman by positioning Export as the more powerful 'man' – in spite of her revealed vagina.[45]

However, it is also possible that this interventionist performance was not read as a performance at all, since the spectators may have read Export in a number of ways - for example as a disturbed woman, a terrorist, or a man-hating woman. As such, the gun would still have been the catalyst prompting them to leave their seats, but the significance of this gun would have been differently inscribed, in which case it is more

than possible that those seated in the auditorium would make no connection between this action and the context within which it was staged. Even if they read Export as a 'loony feminist', they may not have noticed her revealed vagina, and therefore would not have made any link between Export's display of her own body, and the female bodies passively displayed for consumption on the cinematic screen. Again, meaning can never be assumed to reside solely in the performance.

An equally important aspect of performance art and its relation to women artists is that it is frequently derived from the actual life of the artist. The performer *supposedly* takes on no roles, or characters, but presents herself and her world. It is presumed that she does not act or pretend, is not removed from herself, and that her script is self-generated. The performer is both the author and the artwork, and as such, her address to the audience is thought to be unmediated. As the generator and active participant in her own work, the performer is situated not as an object of art but as *both* subject and object. She is believed to be actively asserting her presence, speaking the *I* of subjecthood, speaking her own tongue, and is ultimately seen to be both the speaking subject and the subject of speech.[46]

As the content of performance art pieces draws on the *lived* experiences of the performer, the female performance artist is said to be in a position to displace those images of women that have previously been constructed, revealing instead hidden or denied aspects of womanhood. As such, the stereotypical or fictional category of 'woman' is thrown into question, and other representations are offered up. Women's performance art of the late 1960s and early 1970s generally refused to believe that this was all there was, and sought that which was not yet represented.

In surveying women's performance art of the 1970s in the USA it would appear that women utilised two strategies when dealing with their own representations. One

was a directly political challenge to the position women held in society, through a revealing of the untenability of that position, the other was implicitly political in its revisioning of the symbolic space that 'woman' occupied.

This divergence in artistic strategies somewhat resembles the gap opening up between materialist feminists and radical feminists within the Women's Liberation Movement both in the United States and in Britain. While it would be misguided to separate the two strands into distinct and separate camps, as the one often bleeds into the other (as I will go on to show), it is useful to identify the ways in which the two could generally be seen to differ, in both their political aims and in their deployment within performance art.

Jill Dolan, in her book *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988), provides useful summaries of materialist and radical feminism (although Dolan actually uses the term 'cultural' in place of radical).[47] 'Material feminism', she asserts, 'deconstructs the mythic subject Woman to look at women as a class oppressed by material conditions and social relations.'[48] That is, materialist feminism locates women as historical subjects impacted by changing social, economic and political conditions, and affected by other axes of relations, such as race, class and sexual identity.

Rosemary Hennessy asserts that 'materialist feminism emerged from feminist critiques within marxism', in the late 1970s.[49] Emerging out of such critiques, materialist feminism, although building on the analyses undertaken by socialist feminism, is not identical to it. Indeed, materialist feminism could be said to have contributed to the so-called crisis in knowledge which marks the shift from modernism to postmodernism.[50] Where socialist feminism attempted to work within Marxist discourse to explain the position of women within society in Marxist terms - placing the economic structure as central to all explanations - materialist feminism began to question this focus on the

economic and on class relations, perceiving Marxism as being unable to adequately account for the sexual division of labour and the system of patriarchy. This questioning of Marxist theories and their relevance to the position of women in society was one catalyst for repositioning Marxism itself as a discursive structure, a structure which employed particular systems in the production of its knowledge.

Viewed from a materialist feminism perspective the 'object' of Marxist theory, the centralised norm, was seen to be a masculine norm (the universal subject); the concept of class revolution pointed to a belief in uncontested, universal progress and evolution; the focus on the mode of production and the economic system suggested a global explanation for all social events and configurations, thereby placing Marxist theory as the singular, most appropriate, and therefore 'truthful' discourse capable of producing social change.[51] As Hennessy asserts, 'With its class bias, its emphasis on economic determinism, and its focus on a history exclusively formulated in terms of capitalist production, classic marxism in the seventies had barely begun to analyze patriarchal systems of power.'[52]

Materialist feminism, acknowledging the limitations of Marxist theory in its application to questions relating to gender, continues to apply a historical materialist analysis but, importantly, extends this practice to realms other than those grounded in economic relations. As Jill Dolan has written:

> In materialist discourse, gender is not innate. Rather, it is dictated through enculturation, as gender divisions are placed at the service of the dominant culture's ideology.[53]

Reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that one is not born a woman but becomes one, materialist feminism:

> Far from reifying sexual difference, [...] works to understand how women have been oppressed by gender categories. It attempts to denaturalize the dominant ideology that demands and maintains [...] oppressive social arrangements.[54]

Moreover, materialist feminist does not restrict itself to utilising only Marxist theory, since the critique of this theory implicitly raised the question of the productive power intrinsic to all discourses, and the structures of exclusion operating to maintain the coherency of such discourses. Thus, more recent materialist feminism, attempting to avoid the exclusivity and implicit power of the 'grand narrative', variously utilises the critical practices of postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism and psychoanalysis, as well as Marxist theory, exploring 'woman' as a discursive category which 'is historically constructed and traversed by more than one differential axis.'[55] As such, materialist feminism does not focus exclusively on gender, but extends its critique to sex, class, sexuality, race, and age, understanding all as being discursively constructed and deployed by a range of both supporting and competing ideological structures, which may be variously linked, but are not singularly restricted to, or wholly determined by, a capitalist economic system.

In contrast, radical feminism 'sees knowledge as transcendent, ahistorical, and therefore universal'.[56] Rather than interpreting 'gender' as historically located, radical feminists reify sexual difference by perceiving gender to be immutable, and as such their feminist politics are grounded in a desire to valorise 'the' female gender. Within this feminism, sex and gender are collapsed into each other, one being the natural expression of the other. According to Dolan, radical feminism 'seeks to reverse the gender hierarchy by theorising female values as superior to male values'. The basis for this assumed superiority, as Dolan suggests, is tied to women's reproductive abilities:

> Because they can give birth, women are viewed as instinctually more natural, more closely related to life cycles mirrored in nature. Men are seen as removed from nature, which they denigrate rapaciously. Since women are nurturers, they are seen as instinctively pacifistic. Men, on the other hand, are viewed as

> instinctually violent and aggressive. Women are spiritual; men have lost touch with their spirit in their all-encompassing drive to conquer and claim.[57]

In the following sections I aim to examine the ways in which these two different feminist ideologies have been utilised within feminist performance art. The first artist I wish to look at is Suzanne Lacy, since she has consistently used, and continues to do so, co-operative and collaborative methods. I hope, then, that the following will provide some sort of counter-balance to my focus on solo performance artists.

ONE ROAD: SUZANNE LACY - *THREE WEEKS IN MAY* (1977)

In many of her pieces Suzanne Lacy extends her work into the wider community.[58] In fact, without the participation of sections of that wider community, she would not be able to produce the work. By targeting specific sectors, Lacy also facilitates the formation of smaller, localised communities within larger - usually geographical - communities. Thus, for example, Lacy has worked with elderly women, with women who have escaped domestic abuse, and, in the piece I wish to examine here, with survivors of rape.

Lacy's *Three Weeks in May*, presented over a three week period in Los Angeles in 1977, highlighted sexual violence perpetrated against women in the city; both her means of production and her engagement with the 'issue' rape, prompt me to locate this work as an example of a materialist feminist performance. Throughout the event, Lacy aimed to record specific instances of rape on a daily basis and make rape visible as a social phenomenon. The central features of the piece were two maps, erected in the City Mall Shopping Centre.[59] One map was nominated a 'rape' map onto which Lacy stamped the word 'RAPE' in red letters over any area in which any woman had been raped during the period. The other map, by contrast, focused on strategies of assistance

and prevention by listing the telephone numbers of agencies and organisations working with survivors of sexual violence. This 'empowerment map' safeguarded against portraying 'woman as victim', which would merely reinforce feelings of women's vulnerability and endangerment. While Lacy was concerned to show that rape did occur, and often, she was equally concerned to show that women were not passively accepting it as a way of life in modern society. Equally, by including these numbers, Lacy was able to disseminate information about the agencies to those who may need their support. The exhibition, therefore, became an outreach tool for each of the organisations listed, drawing public attention to their existence.

Throughout the three week period, a variety of different presentations occurred, both public and private. Organisations were invited to deliver presentations to a wide mix of invited press and passing public; Barbara Smith and Cheri Gaulke created a banquet event for women from organisations with differing political views, intended to strengthen the community and facilitate an exchange of ideas; Melissa Hoffman and Anne Gauldrin performed a healing ritual sharing their own rape experiences for an intimate audience; Laurel Klick presented a photographic documentation of her own private ritual staged as an exorcism of her recent assault; Leslie Labowitz presented four public performances, *The Myths of Rape*, *The Rape*, *All Men are Potential Rapists*, and *Women Fight Back*; Lacy herself presented a piece entitled *She Who Would Fly*.

A three part piece. Part one, women came to the gallery over a several hour period to share with each other experiences of sexual assault. They described these in writing, leaving the notes pinned to maps on the wall.
Part two, the actresses, all of whom had directly experienced sexual assault, met to talk and provide each other with a healing experience and context in which to perform the piece.
Part three, the environment was opened to the public who entered the room three or four at a time. They encountered first a lamb cadaver with great white wings, suspended as if in flight. A poem crudely scrawled on black asphalt described a woman poet's experience of being violated. Finally the viewer's attention was

> drawn up toward a ledge over the door where flesh-bared women, stained blood red, crouched like birds, intently watching the audience.[60]

A final part of the overall project was a 'guerrilla' action in which Lacy and three other women went to several street corners previously specified in the rape reports. On the pavement, the outline of a woman's body was drawn in red chalk, and a flower was placed within it. Next to the outline, the words 'A woman was raped near here', and the date on which the crime was committed, were written.[61] The final event of *Three Weeks in May* was a self-defence demonstration, presented at the closing rally, when the maps were 'given' to the City Commission on the Status of Women who decided to install them temporarily inside the City Hall.

Although difficult to measure the success of such a public project, it is unquestionable that one of its strengths lay in the way in which Lacy was able to connect individuals and agencies via the central issue of rape. Through drawing on all of their different resources, Lacy enabled various organisations to become an active part of the project, facilitating the sharing of information and ideas. Thus, not only were artists involved in realising the event, but so too were police, self-defence instructors, politicians, counsellors and press reporters, as well as individual women who shared and testified to their personal experiences of rape. In this way, rape became an issue for diverse strata of society - not just for the women who experienced it. Rape was made to take on the significance of a shared problem as opposed to the view that rape is a woman's problem, and as such, responsibility was transferred from that of the individual woman - especially the woman who had experienced rape - to that of an entire community.

Moreover, Lacy (and the other women involved) aimed to locate women within material conditions and social relations, analysing that location while showing its real

impact on the lives of women. By challenging the societal myths circulating around the issue of the rape of women - that women aren't *really* raped; that women who are raped deserve/asked for it; that it only happens to certain women; that it only happens to a few women; that it's nothing to do with me, I'm not a rapist; that rapes are perpetrated by a tiny minority who are probably mad anyway; that rape is no big deal - Lacy implicitly challenged the wider discursive structures that formulate and put into circulation such myths. These myths are indicative of an ideological system that positions women as sex objects, as second-class citizens, as powerless, as existing for men. By concentrating specifically on a gender-stratified issue - the rape of *women* by *men* - Lacy attempted to put the entire gender system under examination, showing the system to be based on relations of power, thereby revealing that it is the system itself that enables and perpetuates such power relations.

In her method of production, Lacy actively included many voices in the project, seeking to involve people from diverse sections of the community, establishing networks of communication, support and exchange of information. The inclusion of multiple voices ensured that it was not just Lacy's point of view that was expressed, but a variety of different views from throughout the wider women's community. She situated the pieces in public spaces as part of larger society and solicited contributions and reactions from a varied range of sources. By grounding the piece in the reality of women's lives, while simultaneously exposing the system that enables the production of such a reality, Lacy actively encouraged a critique of, and challenge to, the dominant ideological system. As such, I would suggest that *Three Weeks in May* displays and deploys a materialist feminist performance praxis.

ANOTHER ROAD: RADICAL FEMINIST PERFORMANCES

In contrast to *Three Weeks in May*, I wish now to offer an alternative here since many performances in the 1970s did adopt a different political strategy. As stated previously, in distinction to materialist feminists who consider gender to be a cultural construct, radical feminists tend to emphasise gender *difference*, perceiving gender as a natural phenomenon. Their aims are not to reveal and challenge the system that constructs and insists on gender positions, but to challenge the system that would *hierarchise* such positions, seeking a reversal of this hierarchy.

Radical feminist artists, then, believing that women's gender and experience are so inherently different from men's, also assume that their artistic representations are likely to be radically different. As Jill Dolan asserts:

> [Radical] feminist performance critics and practitioners are suspicious of both male forms and contents, since they equate them with male meanings that are alien and oppressive to women. These critics look instead to women's culture for female significations.[62]

Cocoon Ceremony (1978), performed by Donna Henes in Michigan, is exemplary of such radical feminist work. Self-documented in *High Performance*, it is worth including in full Henes' description of the piece:

> in a great circle i visited each of the five great lakes, passing another 125 along the way, on each great lake beach i found one especially high energy stone. on the summer solstice i caught the moon in my mirror and danced with her on the oaster lake rocks, ontario. on the first day of my period i tied my mane into 16 braids and took a boat into the middle of lake margrethe, michigan. i wrapped my head. i came out with fantastic energy, fighting the wool for my breath, and i cut off the braids. on the great circle indian mound in newark, ohio, i offered the energy stones and my chant drumming around and around and around. and then at this point, having circled around long enough to have landed in the center, i could see that the man in the moon in my mirror was me.
>
> Chant for Head Wrapping Ceremony
> i am a source erer
> i am a knot tier
> i am a web weaver

i am a shaman (with split toes)

i am a dreamer
i am a dancer
i am a bruja
i am a witch (which means woman).

i am a connecting force processor.
i am a macro/micro cosmic traveler.

200 years ago i would have been burnt.[63]

Here Henes is firmly located as part of the 'natural' world, as a woman connected closely to nature, not as a means to subvert or escape such nominations as 'witch', or to examine the reasons for that categorisation, but to embrace them and celebrate them. Referencing solstice, energy stones, the moon, and menstruation alongside drumming, chanting, circling and walking, Henes reconnects to the natural world, entering into 'nature as nature'. The binary system that structures the symbolic order, setting woman up as 'nature' in opposition to 'culture', a point I will elaborate upon shortly, is upheld and actively reinforced. The performance does not attempt to contest such meanings, but in fact insists on them.[64]

Similarly, Leslie Labowitz's performance piece *Sproutime*, performed in 1980 in Los Angeles, again aligns the female with nature and creative energy. Set against the backdrop of her work with Suzanne Lacy documented above, this performance is particularly interesting in that it marks a dramatic shift from her earlier performance work which was grounded in a materialist feminism.

The audience entered into Labowitz's garage one at a time - a dark space with racks of germinating seeds hung on one side from ceiling to floor, while on the other were bags of seeds and beans. Labowitz, naked and dimly lit, read to the audience from *The Secret Garden*, after which the audience made its way through her greenhouse, also filled with foliage, coming out into the garden behind the house. In the garden,

oversized and vibrantly coloured artificial flowers, birds, kites and streamers were displayed, providing a backdrop to the artist who again read from *The Secret Garden*, ending the performance by offering the audience a sprout lunch.[65]

Moira Roth suggests that the shift in both form and content displayed in this performance is indicative of the period in which it was executed. Exhausted and disillusioned with the feminist struggles of the 1970s, and the corollary backlash against the feminist movement in the 1980s, Labowitz's change in direction is posited by Roth as a way in which to 'sustain our energies':

> She is expressing not only her own need, but one increasingly shared by others, both men and women, for psychic and spiritual nourishment in such a painful moment in history.[66]

While Labowitz may indeed have been offering 'a poetic model for creating an ecological world in which people can heal themselves and restore their poetic sense',[67] the model shown inescapably links her specifically female body to nature, regeneration, creation, and ultimately birth. In *Sproutime* Labowitz is the maternal figure providing and ensuring a 'haven', a 'dark and luxuriously dank space' - somewhat connotative of the 'womb', where people can be nurtured and brought to life. It is her healing, feminine power that will cure the ills of the world. As the source of life, she is the giver of life and the protector of life. In this piece she literally provides her 'guests' with nourishment by giving them beans which she has cultivated. The associations here between woman, nature and nurture are, as in Henes' performance, foregrounded.

Interestingly and somewhat problematically, in relation to my earlier positioning of Lacy as a practitioner of a materialist feminist ideology, she would seem, by her own admission, to straddle both camps.

> For me now, feminist art must show a consciousness of women's social and economic position in the world. I also believe it demonstrates forms and perceptions that are drawn from a sense of spiritual kinship between women.[68]

The first part of this sentence obviously relates to a materialist understanding of women's position in society. However, the latter part points to something more aligned with radical feminism, with its emphasis on 'forms' and 'perceptions' and 'spiritual kinship'. While it could be argued from a materialist perspective that Lacy is talking about a 'community', a supportive network of women, where forms and perceptions are produced as a result of real, lived experiences, it is difficult to ignore the generalisation imbedded within a spirituality that supposedly links *all* women, and which is represented through forms and perceptions that are innately 'female'. This statement by Lacy demonstrates the difficulty - and mistake - of attempting too strict a demarcation of radical and materialist feminists into two opposing camps. At points, the seemingly very different ideologies overlap, one informing the other, and the actual positioning of the performance may be the result of spectatorial positioning rather than anything intrinsic to the actual piece. Returning to *Three Weeks in May*, such overlapping can be read in those sections of the event where emphasis is placed on ritualistic forms and cleansings, which appear to allude more to a radical than a materialist feminism.

In Leslie Labowitz's piece, *Menstruation Cycle* (1971 - 72), such multiplicity or blurring is even more evident. Labowitz announced in a poster that she would be waiting in her studio for her menstruation cycle and invited anyone interested to join her. In one respect, it could be said that Labowitz was merely making visible and public that which had been hidden in society or, when acknowledged, been scorned, reviled or feared. By publicly displaying what is usually kept private she brought into the open something that happens, at some time, to the majority of women. Such an act implicitly draws attention to the fact that it is usually invisible, raising questions of *why* it is denied.

feared, unacknowledged and the ideology that lies behind such a reaction to a normal biological process. However, an equally valid reading would be that Labowitz wished to celebrate this uniquely female experience, an experience which links women to conception, childbirth, and the cycle of nature.

Faith Wilding stated, in 1976, four years after *Waiting* that Los Angeles feminists:

> are not indiscriminately interested in just any art made by women, for a lot of women have emotionally and psychically internalized the male world... We are interested in a level of sensation and sensitivity directly related to cunt sensation. I'm not talking about sex or orgasm as much as I am about the experience of cunt as a living, seeking, pulsating organism.[69]

While not from the West Coast, performance artist Carolee Schneemann may be perceived as a feminist artist who deals with the female body as a direct source for much of her performance work, not from a materialist basis but as a reclamation of some pure female sexuality, and in this sense her work has been described as being essentialist. In the following chapter I will map the basis of the reading, but will go on to suggest that this nomination is troubled within her performance and that she can be said to be strategically located across the gap that separates radical feminism from materialist feminism. The chapter will then take a different direction as I begin to delineate the problems intrinsic to all of the works I have so far cited - problems, in fact, produced by and embedded within their aims.

CHAPTER 3
DE-ESSENTIALISING ESSENTIALISM

The use of my own body as integral to my work was confusing to many people. I WAS PERMITTED TO BE AN IMAGE BUT NOT AN IMAGE-MAKER CREATING HER OWN SELF-IMAGE. If I had only been dancing, acting, I would have maintained forms of feminine expression acceptable to the culture: 'be the image we want.'

Carolee Schneemann[1]

***

> One type of women's art can be seen as the glorification of an essential female power. This power is viewed as an inherent feminine essence which could find expression if allowed to be explored freely. The essentialist position is based on the belief in a female essence residing somewhere in the body of women. This orientation finds expression in a reading that emphasizes 'vaginal' forms in painting and sculpture and can also be associated with mysticism, ritual and the postulation of a female mythology.[2]

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN - *INTERIOR SCROLL* (1975 - 1977)

In 1975 - 1977 Carolee Schneemann presented a performance piece entitled *Interior Scroll*. The performance begins with Schneemann undressing and wrapping herself in a sheet, which she then drops. While reading from her book, *Cezanne, She Was a Great Painter*, she outlines the contours of her face and body with paint. She then drops the book and slowly extracts a scroll from her vagina, reading it aloud:

> I met a happy man
> a structuralist filmmaker
> - but don't call me that
> it's something else I do -
> he said we are fond of you
> you are charming
> but don't ask us
> to look at your films
> we cannot
> there are certain films
> we cannot look at
> the personal clutter
> the persistence of feelings
> the hand-touch sensibility

the diaristic indulgence
the painterly mess
the dense gestalt
the primitive techniques

(I don't take the advice
of men who only talk to
themselves)
PAY ATTENTION TO CRITICAL
AND PRACTICAL FILM LANGUAGE
IT EXISTS FOR AND IN ONLY
ONE GENDER

even if you are older than me
you are a monster I spawned
you have slithered out
of the excess and vitality
of the sixties.....

he said you can do as I do
take one clear process
follow its strictest
implications intellectually
establish a system of
permutations establish
their visual set.....

I said my film is concerned
with DIET AND DIGESTION

very well he said then
why the train?

the train is DEATH as there
is die in diet and di in
digestion

then you are back to metaphors
and meanings
my work has no meaning beyond the logic of its systems
I have done away with
emotion intuition inspiration -
those aggrandize habits which
set artists apart from
ordinary people - those
unclear tendencies which
are inflicted upon viewers.....

It's true I said when I watch

your films my mind wanders
freely .....
during the half hour of
pulsing dots I compose letters
dream of my lover
write a grocery list
rummage in the trunk
for a missing sweater
plan the drainage pipes for
the root cellar.....
it is pleasant not to be
manipulated

he protested
you are unable to appreciate
the system of the grid
the numerical rational
procedures -
the Pythagorean cues -

I saw my failings were worthy
of dismissal I'd be buried
alive my works lost.....

he said can we be friends
equally though we are not artists
equally I said we cannot
be friends equally and we
cannot be artists equally

he told me he had lived with
a 'sculpturess' I asked does
that make me a 'filmakress?'

Oh No he said we think of you
as a dancer[3]

One reading of this performance suggests that Schneemann is criticising the male artist who would refuse to accept her artistic form, who would wish to turn the 'female' artist into a 'male' artist, by asking that she provide an 'order' to her work, a system of regulation. However, as she is female it is assumed that she is unable to do this, unable to be rational, mathematical, intellectual. (This could be contested, however, by a

reading which suggests that it is not that Schneemann is *unable* to work in this way, but that she *does not want to*. Instead, she actively wants to connect art and life.)

While she may be an artist, she will never be equal to him, and even her status as 'artist' is threatened - she can never be a sculptor, only a sculptr*ess* - or a filmaker*ess*, but even that nomination is denied to her as the male continues to think of her as a dancer (not a dancer*ess*, since dancing is already associated with women). He, however, insists on his right not to be nominated as a filmmaker, since it is not all that he does, only 'something else'.

Schneemann is not simply criticising the man for excluding her from the art world because she is a woman - her criticism is also concerned with the fact that *he* is *unable* to accept her specific *feminine* form - that is, a form lacking in reason and logic, a form cluttered with 'feelings', produced without an organising system of order. By way of contrast, the male voice within the text uses 'intellect' and 'systems', his work is devoid of 'meanings' and 'metaphors', 'emotions, intuition, inspiration'. Within Schneemann's text there is an implicit critique of the 'art establishment'. While the male artist believes that his art is not separate from 'life', Schneemann caustically indicates that it is *so* unconnected to 'real life' that when she views his work, her mind begins to wander - to the *actual* real subjects of 'life', such as her lover and her shopping list. The 'pulsing dots' are far removed from Schneemann's conception of 'real life'. In particular, then, Schneemann is critiquing and resisting the modernist tendency of stripping away the inessential within practice to attain a 'purity' of form.

Rather than take her ironic criticism seriously, the male artist accuses *her* of being unable to understand the intricate system he is using, mirroring perhaps his inability to understand her form. In this sense, Schneemann reverses the hierarchised positions of male/female artist-critic, using the tactics typically deployed against female artists and

redeploying them. There is also a possible slippage, here, between reading Schneemann's performance as a genuine representation of the 'feminine' or as a deliberate *mimicking* of his positioning of her as 'feminine', 'personal', 'primitive'. The ironic voice that Schneemann uses suggests that she may be sending up his image of her by actively embodying it, as if to say: 'You think I use overly personal subjects in my work? You haven't seen anything yet.' When Schneemann uncoils the text from her vagina, it is difficult to imagine that anyone is thinking about grocery lists.

However, returning to a radical essentialist feminist viewpoint, Schneemann removes the text from her vagina as if excavating her deepest insides, her interiors, for some truth, and then bringing it out into the external world as a testimony to that truth. Her form, her art, lies within her specific body, a body accessible through her vagina, her womb. Embedded within her body is a primary knowledge. As Schneemann herself states:

> I saw the vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpent was an outward model... a spiralled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries.... This source of 'interior knowledge' would be symbolized as the primary index unifying spirit and flesh in Goddess worship. I related the womb and vagina to 'primary knowledge'.[4]

In placing the body at the centre of her work, and using *bodily* knowledge as a means to excavate and represent some 'truth', some vision concerning the representation of 'woman' that is distinct from those in general circulation, Schneemann is attempting to fulfil *l'écriture féminines'* demand that women's subjectivity can be represented through *writing* the body:

> I had to understand why there were no women artists in my inherited history. I had to crack the shell to invert turn over smash open. Why all language and all speaking existed in only one gender - male - and all that was female was by inclusion, prescription, allowance... why was there no female genital... the clitoris has been sliced out of cultural erotics and the vagina was a stinking 'hole', an

> absence, dead zone unless stuffed with male functional needs and fearful deforming projections. I had to find out why I believed the basis of creation was a female force denied for 2000 years. I had to put the body where the mind was.[5]

BODILY WRITINGS

> **Woman must write herself [....] Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement.**
>
> Hélène Cixous[6]

***

L'écriture féminine is a feminist strategy that grounds itself upon Lacan's rereading of Freud, but which, in turn, rereads, develops or moves beyond Lacan's formulations regarding subject formation. While Lacan's theorising is problematic for feminists in that, although offering up some explanation for the process of subjectification - namely that the subject is formed in language - it simultaneously positions woman as the 'other' to man.[7] It is this notion that the practice of *l'écriture feminine* would contest.

Lacan's basic position is that prior to entry into language infants have no sense of self (identity) and are no more than a mass of undifferentiated biological drives. The infant believes that there is no separation between the world and itself - indeed the world *is* the self. There is no internal and external, and therefore no need to mediate between the two. (Of course, this is a retroactive, fictional belief, belonging to the realm of the 'imaginary'.)[8]

This symbiotic relationship with the 'world' is destroyed by the entry of the Father (socially prescribed Law), which results in the child 'losing' the body of the mother. When the Father appears, he brings with him the societal taboo of incest. The infant who previously enjoyed unchecked libidinal impulses associated with the body of the mother must suddenly repress these relations, banishing them to the unconscious. The child, from being a unified entity, has become a split subject motivated entirely by lack.

Accompanying the loss of the body of the mother, then, is the loss of a sense of wholeness, translated into lack (particularly of the mother's body), which the subject will

endlessly attempt (and fail) to fill with other substitute objects. From this separation of child from mother, the child learns that it must *articulate* its needs since the objects which guarantee such satisfaction are no longer within the child. 'Lack' becomes translated into desire, mediated in language as 'demand', and always directed towards an external other. 'Reality' can now only be mediated through words which stand in for absent objects.

As the child attempts to articulate its demands it also comes to learn that words have meaning only in relation to their difference from other words. Within each word there is not only an absence (of the object), but difference. To enter into language is to enter into a never-ending chain of signification, unable ever to fully grasp the missing object in its entirety or fullness. Similarly, the child's sense of self-identity is dependent upon its differentiation from other objects. That is, the child can only say 'I' because it knows it is not 'you'. Identity always requires the other which it is not. (The other, then, is also always within the self, and even our sense of self will therefore be divided.)

The phallus (or the symbolic slash that divides the signifier from the signified), is the signifier of both lack and fullness, absence and presence, power and powerlessness. As desire is the desire to fill up 'lack', our desire is the desire for the phallus, the 'transcendental signifier', which will return us to our ('imaginary' sense of) wholeness, to our unmediated relation with reality, to the body of the mother, to our oneness with the world, to the Real.[9]

When we enter into language we necessarily take up a place within an already 'meaningful' structure, the symbolic order. Every sign within the symbolic is already imprinted with a cultural encoding and our positioning within this structure is determined by whether we 'have' the phallus or not. Since all subjects are necessarily constructed as 'lacking' - 'lack' being the condition of entry into the symbolic order - no one can

actually *have* the phallus (such 'lack' - like 'fullness' - is imaginary). It is only within the symbolic order, then, that certain objects are imbued with phallic property. As the symbolic order in Western society is produced from within a patriarchal structure (in a mutually reinforcing relationship), the object most frequently given phallic equivalence is the penis - said to be a mark of difference between the sexes. In this instance, the phallus signifies desire, operating within a circuit in which two complementary opposites are joined together to produce 'wholeness'. It is apparent, then, that the phallus does not so much mark difference as sameness - you either have one or you do not. Thus, while no one can *have* the phallus, certain people *imagine* that they have it (and the power that it symbolises), while others are made to symbolise its lack. The figure bearing Lack is the other which gives 'he' who 'has' it his identity *as* the One who has it. If she is imagined as lacking, then he can imagine that he is whole. Differences between the sexes are organised in a hierarchical relationship. That is, they are not A and B, but A and not-A, which translates as having and not-having the phallus - the Same. By organising difference into binary opposites the phallic signifier establishes and maintains other binary oppositions in which woman (and other Others) will always be placed on the negative side of the slash (the absence and lack of the phallus).

Within a patriarchal symbolic - in which the penis, as visible mark of sexual difference becomes metaphorically equivalent to the phallus - the girl child is positioned on the side of 'not have'. It is only by becoming the phallus - the object of the man's desire - that the woman can hope to fill this lack, to *be* the phallus. In this sense, woman can only ever be an *object*, never a subject. While woman must obviously take up a place in the symbolic in order to speak of an 'I', that place is a tenuous location since woman, positioned as an object of desire rather than a desiring subject, speaks in a mode of 'masquerade', as an imitation of the masculine, phallic subject. She wants him to

desire her (her desire is to be desired) and so turns herself into the phallus. When she speaks, then, it is not clear that she speaks of or as herself.

***

If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this 'within', to explode it, turn it around, seize it.[10]

While the term *écriture féminine* has variously been applied to the French feminists Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julie Kristeva, I wish to focus here on the writings of Hélène Cixous and her notion of the pre-symbolic.[11] Crossing Cixous' concept with Schneemann's performance, I aim to examine the potential that such an inter-relationship affords for a re-reading of Schneemann's work.

It is improbable (perhaps impossible) that Schneemann had read any of Cixous' writing at the time of *Interior Scroll*, since much of it did not appear in translation until the 1980s, and even the original versions of *The Laugh of the Medusa* and *La Jeune Née* did not appear in print until 1976 and 1975 respectively - by which time *Interior Scroll* was already being performed. However, it is more than probable that Cixous and Schneemann were both respectively caught up in a flux of feminist thought in France and the USA which undoubtedly had influences and impacts on their respective works. As Susan Sellers writes in relation to Cixous, 'It should again be emphasized that *The Newly Born Woman* was written at the height of feminist debates in France.'[12]

Returning to Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*, I would suggest that it bears close similarities to Hélène Cixous' call that women 'write' their bodies. This linking of the two is perhaps obvious, since both have been accused of 'essentialism'. However, I wish to resist the foregrounding of this particular similarity by suggesting that, in both cases, such a nomination is perhaps too easily given.

An initial difficulty that needs to be addressed in crossing one with the other is that Cixous' demand is located in the practice of 'writing'. Schneemann is not 'writing' but performing, albeit with some writing contained *within* (literally) her performance. Can the transference from 'writing' to 'performance' be accomplished?[13] While Cixous has always insisted that *écriture féminine* is a writing practice that aims never to exclude or appropriate the *other*, she also admits that:

> there is a certain path of development to follow: there is the path of the self, one must develop in oneself out of oneself... One must become acquainted with this self, make a descent into the agitated secret of this self, into its tempests, one must cover this complex route with its meanderings into the chambers of the unconscious, in order to then emerge from me towards the other. The ideal: less and less of me and more and more of you.[14]

> It takes time for 'I' to get used to 'I'. Time for the 'I' to be sure 'I' exists. Only then is there room for the other.[15]

Cixous is here citing the psychoanalytic concept, summarised above, of self-identity being dependent on (the differentiation from) the other - which is nevertheless always returned to the Same (the Not-I). Cixous' specific project is to enable these others to exist in their *difference*. But before these others there is the self. In performance art (of the 1970s) there seems to be only self. It is therefore, perhaps, the ideal vehicle to drive downwards into the depths of this (unconscious) self.[16] What is of primary importance in performance art is the real, living presence of the *body*, and it is to this *body* that Cixous makes her call. 'Write the body.' How better to write the body than to make the body *itself* the tool of writing - the pen, the brush, the living letter? As Cixous argues in *Writing Differences*:

> Language is a translation. It speaks through the body. Each time we translate what we are in the process of thinking, it necessarily passes through our bodies.[17]

The similarity between Cixous' description of the relation of writing to the body and Schneemann's enactment of that writing in *Interior Scroll* is startling:

> Life becomes text starting out from my body. I am already text. History, love, violence, time, work, desire inscribe it in my body, I go where the 'fundamental language' is spoken, the body language into which all the tongues of things, acts, and beings translate themselves, in my own breast, the whole of reality worked upon in my flesh, intercepted by my nerves, by my senses, by the labor of all my cells, projected, analyzed, recomposed into a book. Vision: my breast as the Tabernacle. Open. My lungs like the scrolls of the Torah. But a Torah without end whose scrolls are imprinted and unfurled throughout time and, on the same History, all the histories, events, ephemeral changes, and transformations are written. I enter into myself with my eyes closed, and you can read it. This reading is performed here, by the being-who-wants-to-be-born, by an urge, something that wants at all costs to come out, to be exhaled, a music in my throat that wants to resound, a need of the flesh then, that seizes my trachea, a force that contracts the muscles of my womb and stretches my diaphragm as if I were going to give birth through my throat, or come. And it's the same thing.[18]

Like Cixous' text, Schneemann's 'text' comes (literally) from her body, the place in which resides the 'fundamental language' - the 'primary knowledge' which is brought forth by the body/language - in the breast, the flesh, the nerves, the senses, the cells, brought forth like the 'scrolls', the 'scrolls' (literally) brought from the inside to the outside of the body, by the body. An entering into the self, and a bringing out, an unfurling, which can be read. A reading, moreover, which can be *performed*. By the one who wants-to-be-born, the one who brings the self from the womb, from the 'passageway, the entrance, the dwelling place of the other in me - the other that I am and am not',[19] a self that wants to come out, a coming which causes the muscles of the womb to contract and stretch the diaphragm, as if giving birth to the voice, as if coming. And so the scroll comes/comes from Schneemann's vagina/womb, with the words a testimony to what she feels, a 'fidelity to what [she] feels, there, at the extremity of life, at the nerve endings, around the heart'.[20] As she reaches down/up/in, touches *inside* herself her own birth is imminent.[21] As Françoise Defromont writes, 'The body has become a

room of one's own, the very place of inscription of writing, a political space in itself which abolishes centuries of colonisation of the feminine body.'[22]

And yet what *is* this body into which Cixous and Schneemann delve - this supposedly *feminine body*? For Cixous, there is undoubtedly such a thing *as* the 'feminine body'. What is more troubling is that on the one hand, perhaps the hand that reaches up inside the body, the feminine would seem to be tied to the biological body of the female - thus raising the spectre/sceptre of essentialism noted earlier. In *The Newly Born Woman*, Cixous repeatedly cites the biological female body as necessarily giving rise to a different relation to the other, a relation which refuses to appropriate or exclude the other, but which encompasses it:

> It is not only a question of the feminine body's extra resource, this specific power to produce some thing living of which her flesh is the locus, not only a question of a transformation of rhythms, exchanges, of relationship to space, of the whole perceptive system [....] It is also the experience of a 'bond' with the other, all that comes through in the metaphor of bringing into the world.
>
> There is a bond between woman's libidinal economy - her *jouissance*, the feminine Imaginary - and her way of self-constituting a subjectivity that splits apart without regret.[23]

Furthermore, Cixous believes that inhabiting a sexed body must necessarily induce different experiences:

> I don't believe a man and a woman are identical. [...] Our differences have to do with the way we experience pleasure, with our bodily experiences, which are not the same. Our different experiences necessarily leave different marks, different memories. [...] If I write letting something of my body come through, then this will be different, depending on whether I have experience of a feminine or masculine body.[24]

And it would seem to be this feminine body to which Cixous is specifically calling when she states that the act of writing will 'realise' the relationship of woman to her sexuality and asks that woman:

> Write yourself: your body must make itself heard. Then the huge resources of the unconscious will burst out. Finally the inexhaustible feminine Imaginary is going to be deployed.[25]

This feminine imaginary is located in the pre-symbolic relation between the self and the m/other, a position which refutes Lacan's theory of the formation of the subject which is dependent on separation from the m/other and therefore imbued with loss. Cixous believes that the body of the mother has a continuing effect on the subject and the inscription of this body's codes would disrupt the patriarchal symbolic. The inclusion of the maternal body in writing provides a way through the loss and separation figured in phallocentric society. In the feminine imaginary the split (from the body of the mother) that constitutes subjectivity is a split without regret, since the body of the mother is *not* lost - it is merely outwith the (paternal) symbolic. This m/other language is described as 'a singing from a time before the Law, before the Symbolic took one's breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation', a language that will 'run the codes ragged'.[26] If one goes back to the unconscious, to the banished/repressed body of the m/other one can allow it to resurface and break through the phallocentric codes. Cixous suggests that rather than being completely and forever separated from the body of the mother and therefore propelled into desire by lack, the 'rhythms and articulations of the mother's body have a continuing effect' and are important in 'preventing the codes of the patriarchal Symbolic from becoming rigidified and all-power-ful'.[27] The unconscious is a

> magic book by more than one author... And all women feel, in the dark or the light, what no man can experience in their place, the incisions, the births, the explosions in libido, the ruptures, the losses, the pleasures in our rhythms. My unconscious is in touch with your unconscious.[28]

Through the unconscious, we are seemingly back in the realm of the specific *female* body. This body, however, *is* historically located: 'a Torah without end whose scrolls are imprinted and unfurled throughout time and, on the same History, all the histories. events, ephemeral changes, and transformations are written'. Moreover, the feminine economy is not limited to the female biological body - as evidenced by the work of male writers cited by Cixous as examples of *écriture féminine*.[29]

The crux of Cixous' theory is that a feminine economy is one in which the other is not annihilated or appropriated, whereas in the masculine economy the other is the other to the One - the 'not', the 'negative'. In refusing to take up the phallic position of the unitary subject (the One), the feminine writer can inhabit a number of places simultaneously. The writer who does not eradicate the difference of the other, therefore, is a writer utilising a feminine economy, and that writer can be male or female.

It would seem, then, that Cixous both does and does not ground the feminine economy in the biological female body. Her emphasis on the 'maternal body' as a link to the 'other' risks a traversal of the essential, and yet she also insists that the biological male body can be maternal - and the female body paternal. 'Haven't you been the father of your spouse, and perhaps the brother of your brother, or hasn't your brother been your big sister?'[30]

Ultimately, Cixous' aim is to eradicate such labels and boxes, which neatly demarcate persons into one thing or another, belying the potential 'bisexuality' that resides in each living person.[31] Moving beyond the codes, the neat boxes, one escapes the logic circumscribed by the phallologocentric system:

> As soon as you let yourself be led beyond codes, your body filled with fear and with joy, the words diverge, you are no longer enclosed in the maps of social constructions, you no longer walk between walls, meanings flow.[32]

Is this not the 'beyond' that Schneemann also envisages when she speaks of the logical codes of her male artist acquaintance? A getting beyond the hierarchised binary system that would arrange everything into couples - not of difference, but of value, with woman/female/feminine at the lower end of the scale? If one can get beyond this binary system one can reach other places where the other is *known*, rather than appropriated, and difference is seen to be equal rather than hierarchised:

> She who looks with the look that recognizes, that studies, respects, doesn't take, doesn't claw, but attentively, with gentle relentlessness, contemplates and reads. caresses, bathes, makes the others gleam. Brings back to light the life that's been buried, fugitive, made too prudent. Illuminates and sings it its names.[33]

And yet there remains a problem in this crossing of Cixous with Schneemann, a space in-between them, as the words that Schneemann reads are not the words of the 'feminine', not yet her own words. As Schneemann reaches up, and removes the text, she is not reaching for the other, but for the self (the first step towards the other). However, this self remains contained within a binary structure - he/she, I/you, masculine/feminine. Schneemann's text is not, then, 'bisexual' - there are two sexual economies, held poles apart. Schneemann is not so much producing *écriture féminine*, but mirroring Cixous' demand that such a writing - and a recognition of such writing - is necessary, so that the feminine is able to exist, in 'her' difference.

While the words of the text speak a 'masculine' economy, is it possible to suggest that the *way* in which they are written hints towards some other economy - an economy that moves beyond the codes? The written/spoken words are disjointed, disordered, illogical, cluttered, metaphorical (the difficulty of writing about *écriture féminine* is that I can only use the words I have available to describe the text and these are inscribed with the 'negative'. The 'feminine' exceeds the existing conceptual framework). The rhythm of the text points to the 'poetic', the open-ended, the shifting,

even while the actual words seem to uphold and exist within the symbolic order. The words then, and the meanings inscribed within them, are not 'feminine' as such, but their arrangement does indicate a practice of writing beyond the restrictive hegemonic 'masculine' register which is ordered into a unified whole. Schneemann seems to both mirror Cixous' theory and partially practice it. The next necessary step would be the one that takes her out of the binary structures and into the pre-symbolic, where she can sing 'from a time before the law'.[34]

Can we be sure, though, that the naked woman, the body before us, the words that Schneemann speaks (here and in the future) will be *heard* with a difference? Or will she (and those who follow her) continue to be reinscribed as primitive, as irrational, as *not*-man, returned 'to the image we want', the negative other of the Same? Similarly, will we, as women, be able to stage a dialogue across our differences from each other, as well as across our internal differences, that would not preclude a feminist politics?

BODILY (RE)MARKS

The representation of bodies is always ideologically marked; it always connotes gender, which carries with it the meanings inscribed by the dominant culture.

Jill Dolan[35]

In the next section of this chapter I wish to navigate a different path through Schneemann's performance, for while the body may be the tool of inscription it is also, as I shall explicate here, always already inscribed. In this respect, Schneemann's act of literalising the writing of the feminine *on the female body* is a problematic act that carries greater risks than merely writing *from* the body.[36]

As suggested in the previous chapter, those women who were recognised as making art were admitted to the establishment under something of a disguise - their female status was subsumed under the title of 'artist' which was generically assumed to be male. To be located in the position of 'male artist' was to inhabit, paradoxically, a neutral location, that is, to be distanced, disinterested and objective. Although Schneemann had been involved in numerous avant-garde performances and was associated with Fluxus events and Happenings, she expresses vividly the feeling that she was never fully accepted as an equal, on her own terms:

> In 1963 to use my body as an extension of my painting-constructions was to challenge and threaten the psychic territorial power lines by which women were admitted to the Art Stud Club so long as they behaved *enough* like men, did work clearly in the traditions and pathways hacked out by the men.[37]

In an unsent letter to Alan Kaprow she asks:

> What was my position among you then? My own title private title ironic title was 'Cunt Mascot.' Cunt Mascot on the men's art team.

And a little later in the letter:

> None of the other men ever asked me what I was doing, thinking, or spoke about my work. It went in one direction: I asked them about their processes, events. I knew that a mutual exchange was normal! I observed you among yourselves: explaining, writing, introducing, meeting, making projects, plans [....][38]

On the one hand, then, it would seem that the only way to be accepted onto the 'men's team' was to play by the men's rules, as laid down by the men. However, even this strategy did not seem to produce total acceptance, because, after all, under the guise lay the 'cunt', and the only place for a cunt on the team would seem to be as mascot. As a token of luck, the mascot is firmly linked to the natural, non-rational, mysterious, and the bestower or giver - all of which are 'feminine' symbols. As evidenced from

Schneemann's account of her experiences on the 'male team', her position was marginal and the support offered to her from her literally fellow artists minimal.

In relation to margins, anthropologist Mary Douglas suggests that:

> all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins.[39]

Furthermore, 'to have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power.'[40] The margins are the edges which form the border or boundary that enacts a frame around a subject, demarcating an inside from an outside. Schneemann was expelled from the Fluxus movement by its founder, George Maciunas, because of her 'baroque, theatrical, sexual tendencies'.[41] This expulsion indicates that she had overstepped the boundaries which he had erected in order to 'frame' the Fluxus movement. By overstepping the boundaries she stepped into the margin, that is beyond the frame, but in that very beyond, supporting it.[42]

The framing of 'art' is not an objective practice. Frames are erected in historical, social, and political contexts. They are both effects and supports of the structures in which they are embedded, and as such have material and ideological consequences. As Griselda Pollock writes:

> art works are texts and can be understood as a site of a particular organisation of signs which produce meanings in a field composed of other signs. [...] Curators, critics, historians operate within socially specific and ideologically boundaried frameworks. What is included, omitted, how objects are presented, defined or evaluated, all this is not reflection of inherent qualities of meaning [because there are none], but representations of current meanings which are therefore inflected by the inequalities and social hierarchies of the society which is doing the classifying, curating and management of culture.[43]

The prerequisite of the frame is the movement between the inside and the outside, for it is in the tension between these that both come to be understood, and as such one relies

on the other. The inside/outside of the boundaries are not distinct, but touch each other at the edges, creating the necessary tension to hold the frames in place. Moreover, the frame is the site at which judgements (sights) are made. Without the stability of the frame, it is impossible to comprehend what is being seen. The frame thus acts as the staging for the scene to be seen, the site for sight.[44]

The appropriate *needs* the inappropriate to maintain its position of dominance. (The same is true of the 'inappropriate' but the inappropriate stands to gain less from this nomination.) Boundaries, then, produce threats which justify separation. Jesse Helms' attack on the 'NEA four' reveals explicitly this productive power of boundaries.[45] The line which Helms maintained had been crossed by Holly Hughes, Karen Finley, Tim Miller and John Fleck was the one separating 'art' from 'obscenity'.[46] The danger implicit in this crossing was that this line would dissolve, as would the distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' - a distinction necessary for Helms to maintain and produce his own self-identity and subject positioning. If there is no 'bad', Helms cannot assert himself as the moral right/Right. Relegating and keeping these artists in the margin Helms constructs them as the necessary threat. Any encroaching on the 'good' side of the frame demands a performative act of censorship which returns the object or artist to the 'negative' edge, remarking them as 'inappropriate' while also remarking those (vulnerable persons) who need to be 'protected' by Helms, and remarking himself as the arbiter of 'good' taste. This creation of 'bad' or 'filthy' artists simultaneously strengthens the position of 'good' or 'clean' artists. Noticeably, the 'bad' are those already located on other margins, designated as already dangerous (the feminist, the homosexual, the lesbian).

Douglas asserts that:

> A polluting person is always in the wrong. He [*sic*] has developed some wrong condition or simply *crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone*.[47]

When the binaries that structure the Western system of meaning and understanding are troubled, when the slash between inside/outside, art/obscenity (and any other number of binaries) are crossed, the entire system is thrown into crisis, inciting what Rebecca Schneider and Vivian M. Patraka refer to as 'binary terror'.[48] Such terror is 'directly proportionate to the social safety insured in the maintenance of such apparatus of sense'.[49] Helms' attack on the 'NEA four' could, therefore, be read as a physical enactment of this binary terror - terror written over a body perceived to be under threat.

Similarly, Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* potentially incites such terror as she positions herself across several binaries simultaneously. Admittedly, Schneemann's painting of her body with an earth coloured substance could be contextualised within a radical feminist art practice, as a reclamation/re-presentation of a ritualistic act, serving to link the piece to invocations of Gaia, The Earth Mother/Goddess. Such a reading is strengthened by the 'envaginated' text which is coiled snake-like - 'a spiralled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries [...] the primary index unifying spirit and flesh in Goddess worship.' However, to go somewhat against this grain, it is also possible to read the painting of Schneemann's body *by* Schneemann's *own* hands as an implicit critique of the historical practice of women being painted by men, of women being the objects of art for the male artist subject. Schneemann herself states that she 'painted large strokes defining the contours of my body and face', suggesting that these strokes were ones of active self-definition.

As stated earlier, women cannot 'be' artists, and yet Schneemann's presented body is definitely, defiantly female. She draws attention to its specificity by the paint she administers to its contours. The binary woman/artist is thus thrown into confusion

(although, of course, she may be denied the nomination 'artist' by those who refuse to regard her work as 'art'). Secondly, she is both the subject and the object, therefore straddling the subject/object divide. Thirdly, she is a woman and women are passive, but here she is actively creating, embodying the different locations of passive object/active subject simultaneously, confusing the frames that keep them distinct. Fourthly, as the self-same object of the subject she is dissolving the distance between objectivity/subjectivity, closing the gap that allows for disinterested observation. Such a move troubles the internal/external and mind/body divide. Finally, that which is literally internal is pulled out to the external, raising questions not only of the supposed absolutes of such positions, but also of the appropriate/inappropriate of art.

Schneemann writes of the piece 'When I first made the actions of *Interior Scroll* it was considered repellent, awful [...]'.[50] As a student, Schneemann, believing that no part of the body should have been considered taboo, painted self-portraits:

> using my entire body as one which stood for all/or any human shape from which I would learn. I was free to study, perceive my own genital shape and form - as well as my ears and elbows.
>
> My art professor told other students this study was narcissistic. [...] The male students doing their endless self-portrait studies were not considered 'narcissistic.' But then they did leave out their bodies!

This quote raises the important issue of who is permitted to paint what. While women have been the objects of art for male studies in form for over two hundred years, when a woman becomes her own object, accusations of narcissism are levelled against her. As Lucy Lippard noted of the 1970s:

> Men can use beautiful, sexy women as neutral objects or surfaces, but when women use their own faces and bodies, they are immediately accused of narcissism.[51]

It was acceptable for Yves Klein to use women's bodies as brushes, but unacceptable for women to use their own bodies as brushes or canvases for their own work.[52]

Rebecca Schneider provides an excellent example of this double-system of operation, by citing Shigeko Kubota's *Vagina Painting*, performed at the Fluxfest in New York City in 1965. Squatting on the floor, with a brush supposedly extending from her vagina, Kubota performed a 'vagina painting'.[53] The piece was hated by her male colleagues. Schneider concludes that:

> Woman as artist's brush, woman fetishized as phallus was acceptable, even chic. But woman *with* brush was in some way woman *with* phallus and thus unnatural, monstrous, threatening, primitive - certainly not artistic.[54]

In Schneider's opinion, it is not the explicit female body that was the problem. Instead, '*the agency of the body displayed, the author-ity of the agent* - that was the problem.'

I would agree entirely with Schneider - the crux of the problem circulates around who gets to portray what, for whom and why. However, I would also suggest that the explicitness of the female body (in particular, the nude female body) within both Kubota's and Schneemann's work was partly the problem - or rather, nakedness was the problem, as the naked body remained naked, instead of being rendered nude.[55] Schneemann's 'nakedness' served to erect a barrier to her work's inclusion as 'art', aligning it instead with the obscene, thus maintaining the boundary between the two and excluding Schneemann (read 'woman') from a male dominated preserve.

If woman is the symbol of nature and man that of culture, what happens to those distinctions when woman creates a cultural product? Or, more precisely, what happens when the 'other' upon which the male (heterosexual) artist's 'erection' depends, ceases to be the other? The erection becomes threatened, without potency. Impotent. The Helmsian fear is evident once again.

As Lynda Nead explicates, utilising Kenneth Clark's formulation of the naked body versus the nude body, the nude is 'the body "clothed" in art, the body in representation'.[56] Following from this, the naked must therefore be the body prior to its representation, prior to its aesthetic transformation; the nude is the *cultural* transformation of the *naturally* naked. The naked is transformed by the artist - the subject located at a distance making judgements (for the benefit of the viewer) of what is external and what is internal to the object - into the nude. Matter is likewise converted into 'form', and the natural, through the skill of the artist's hand (read male) is brought under cultural (read his) control. Culture triumphs over nature and disorder is brought to order. Without the imprint of culture, then, the body is left in its natural, naked state, as matter - without form or order, and therefore in *excess* of art, beyond the boundaries of art.[57]

The naked body sits precisely on the framing edge (margin) between art and obscenity (echoing the virgin/whore binary). Transformed into the 'nude' it is accepted as 'art'; without such a transformation it is 'obscene'. Interestingly, Yoko Ono states that male artists 'rejected as animalistic' the live works of women in the 1960s.[58] Woman, unable to *be* an artist, can only present the obscenely naked female body. As Nead writes:

> The female nude is meant to transcend the marks of individualized corporeality by means of a unified formal language; when this fails, both the image of the body and the feelings of the viewer are profaned, that is, desecrated or violated.[59]

As Schneemann is presenting her *own* body, that body is explicitly and unavoidably marked with her own individualised embodied corporeality. This is not some made or found object, but an 'object' which Schneemann inhabits. The 'profane' translates literally to mean 'outside the temple'[60] - in the profane act of showing her naked body.

Schneemann is kept outside of the sacred temple of art. By attempting to insert herself into that temple she has also 'violate[d] or pollute[d] (that which is entitled to respect)'.[61] The pollution metaphor raises its spectre once again, but its shadow throws into relief the question of *who* decides *what* is 'entitled to respect'.

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> The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious.
>
> Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolize its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind [....] By simply issuing forth [they] have traversed the boundary of the body.[62]

Representations of the female nude body typically reduce it to its surface elements. The internal is hidden from the gaze of the viewer. By uncoiling the scroll from her interior, Schneemann enacts another profanity. She visibly marks the internal by bringing it out into the external. Here her 'orifice' is made explicit, not denied. The text which is brought from inside to outside is *abject*, traversing the internal/external boundary, with the abject being defined as the space between subject and object (a space which she deliberately closes by being both).[63] Traversing 'the boundaries of the body' Schneemann reveals that which an aesthetics of 'distance' would seek to conceal - the place which causes terror in the male psyche - the castrated (and castrating) female.

What the nude/naked binary obscures, however, is that the body, especially the female body, is *always already* marked. As Nead asserts:

> Within social, cultural and psychic formations, the body is rendered dense with meaning and significance, and the claim that the body can ever be outside of representation is itself inscribed with symbolic value. There can be no naked 'other' to the nude, for the body is always already in representation.[64]

While Schneemann may therefore be troubling many binaries in her performance, the danger implicit in this is that such a troubling will not dislodge the female body from its

prescribed place in the symbolic order or signifying economy, but will in fact reinscribe it.

In representation the sexual difference of woman is figured, amongst other things, as lack. This prompts Jill Dolan to write that Schneemann and other performers

> fail to see that the female body is a sign which, when placed in representation, participates in a male-oriented signifying practice.[65]

While I think that this is an overly simplistic reading of *Interior Scroll*, which overlooks the 'binary terror' that Schneemann incites, Dolan's criticism is still one to be reckoned with.[66] Though Schneemann may indeed trouble binaries, this does not necessarily ensure that her specific female body will shed the marks it is made to bear in a patriarchal or phallocentric signifying economy.

Prior to engaging with the intrinsic difficulty raised here, it is important to remark the historical context of *Interior Scroll*, and the other performances already cited; women performance artists of the late 1960s throughout the 1970s undeniably played an important role in laying the foundations for women's intervention into the representational system. Located within a fervent feminist movement, much performance work of the 1970s attempted to challenge male (read dominant) representations of women by re-presenting other images of women. Through positing the 'real' lives of women, and by implication the unacceptable and untenable position of women in society, as exemplified by the performance artists participating in Womanhouse, many female artists were part of a movement struggling to unite women against what was perceived to be a common oppression. Alternatively, some performers, such as Henes, through offering images of women that represented them 'positively', in contrast to the more familiar practice of denigrating femininity, attempted to celebrate 'womanhood'. While women were generally perceived as invisible, lacking, or 'other',

both materialist and radical feminist performance artists attempted to imagine what this 'other' might look like from another place, to make the invisible visible through performance acts of self-expression, expressing the 'real' or the 'imagined'.[67] Such work implicitly attempted to fulfil a feminist agenda through promoting an awareness of the position of women in contemporary society and contesting that position, thereby hoping to produce change. Also implicit to the work, then, was the belief that change was possible.

In Jeanie Forte's opinion, the fact that each performer is a live, living female body attempting self-representation and speaking out *as* a woman goes someway towards undoing the system that would prescribe woman as lack, as other, as object to the male subject:

> The female body as subject clashes in dissonance with its patriarchal text, challenging the very fabric of representation by refusing that text and posing new, multiple texts grounded in real women's experience and sexuality.[68]

For Forte, the representation of 'real' women will reveal as fabricated the 'Woman' that exists to support the present system of representation, allowing the heterogeneous and heteronomous voices of *different* women to be represented in its place. In defiance of the patriarchal structure, women assert themselves as 'speaking subjects'.

While not wishing to deny the importance of this work in its attempt to figure 'woman' as an active subject, this production of alternative representations of women belied, as Moira Schor writes, 'a belief in representation [....]'[69] Operating within a representational system based on oppositional relations (One and other), the performances problematically suggested that this system could in some way be transcended and that 'woman' need not be figured as a negative signifier. However, as Suzanne Danuta Walters asserts:

> While 'more women' or 'better images' might expand our cultural horizons, they will not fundamentally challenge the patriarchal 'ways of seeing' embedded in the process of representation. To argue for less stereotypical images avoids an attack on the deep structures of the signifying practices that produce such images in the first place.[70]

While 'woman' may find or create 'her' voice and speak out, there is no guarantee that she will be heard. As evidenced by the response to Schneemann's, Ono's and Kubota's work, these performers, in spite of their efforts, could not erase or replace the inscriptions which already marked them as 'animalistic', 'primitive' and 'obscene'.

IN THE SHADOWS OF A SIGNIFIER

For practitioners who work in forms that have a visual dimension, the central issue is how to image the female body without engendering 'woman.'

Kate Davy[71]

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In the final section of this chapter I wish to explicate the problems implicit to the strategy of refiguring the image of 'Woman' within representation. First, while these images may have actively confronted stereotypes, sexism and the negative images of women, embedded within the majority of this work was the belief that if patriarchy was destroyed, then the 'true' or unoppressed, liberated woman would be able to emerge. Secondly, there was an implicit assumption between representation and the 'real world', with performers believing that they could actually show 'real' women. Thirdly, it was assumed that these other representations, made by women, would be 'better' and more 'truthful' images than those already in circulation, and fourthly, that such representations would, in time, come to replace the previous (mis)representations, acting as catalysts for a systemic change in gender relations. Running beneath, and connecting all of these

problems, was one intrinsic difficulty. Even where it was acknowledged that gender roles were historical constructs, beneath these roles there remained (to greater or lesser degrees) some 'unconstructed' identifiable 'woman' - the political subject of feminisms.[72] As such, the sign 'woman', while perhaps being perceived as 'constructed', continued to be the given ground for a feminist practice and remained unproblematised as an identity category. If, however, one suggests that 'woman' is a signifier created in various discourses (and can actually be no more than this), then an urgent question arises: who is the 'subject' that we are attempting to represent (politically and aesthetically), and where do such representations become authorised, since representing the 'real' of 'woman' is an impossible task?

Aiming to present more truthfully representative images of women, many performers grounded their search for truth in their own lived bodily experiences. This desire for truth is implicitly connected to the Enlightenment humanist belief of more 'truthful' knowledge automatically resulting in freedom and progress for all. Such a belief is itself grounded in the concept of universal 'reason'. As Jane Flax sums it up:

> The accumulation of more knowledge (the getting of more truth) results simultaneously in an increase in objectivity (neutrality) and in progress. To the extent that power/authority is grounded in this expanding knowledge it too is progressive, that is, it becomes more rational and expands the freedom and self-actualization of its subjects who naturally conform their reason to its (and their) laws.[73]

It is assumed that through applying reason one can access the 'real', where the 'real' is something that is universal, external, unmediated, independent of the knower. Therefore, this knowledge is the 'Truth' in the sense that it is not the product, artefact, or effect of a particular set of historical or discursive practices. The 'real' is something pure, purely present, unaffected by external conditions. However, as Flax asserts, the quest for the 'real'

> conceals most Western philosophers' desire, which is to master the world once and for all by enclosing it within an absolute system they believe represents or corresponds to a unitary Being beyond history, particularity, and change. In order to mask his idealizing desire, the philosopher must claim that this Being is not the product, artefact, or effect of a particular set of historical or linguistic practices. It can only be the thought of the Real itself.[74]

To attain unity, coherence, and stability - to suggest the 'Rational' - anything which threatens it must be excluded. As women constitute the other to the male philosopher, her stories are expunged. The traditional representation of the 'real' is a representation produced by men.[75]

Feminists' relationship to the Enlightenment is somewhat paradoxical in that by producing (and representing) their own knowledge, they were implicitly critiquing the supposed objectivity and impartiality of that which was considered to be 'universal', while at the *same time* insisting that their own knowledge was more 'Truthful'. This is not to deny that this strategy contributed much to the feminist struggle by insisting on women's capacity for rational thinking, contesting the equation whereby woman = irrational. Again, as Jane Flax states:

> Concepts such as the autonomy of reason, objective truth, and universally beneficial progress through scientific discovery are very appealing, especially to those who have been defined as incapable or merely the objects of such facts.[76]

However, this Enlightenment project of reason, truth and progress has been widely attacked since the 1970s by both psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theory, prompting an awareness that concepts of truth, reason and progress are discursively constructed and therefore inherently partial, provisional and contingent.

In psychoanalytic terms, since the positioning of subjects in the social structure is dependent on their constitution in language, one cannot stand outside of this structure to gain a 'purer' vantage point. One is always already implicated in the structure that

constructs one's subjectivity. Furthermore, in order to become a subject, according to Lacan, the individual must undergo a series of repressions which constitute the unconscious, which is itself, in Lacanian terms, structured like a language. Thus, underneath every appeal to reason and objectivity lies the unconscious, about which the conscious subject knows nothing. As such, Lacan's theory of the unconscious strikes a severe blow to notions of rational thought and the unified subject.

Furthermore, as poststructuralism has revealed, meaning is never wholly present to itself, since it always contains within it a (present) absence - that which it is not, which makes it what it is. Each meaning is therefore a combination of presence and absence. Meaning also passes continuously along the chain of signifiers, forever shifting, slipping and unable to be pinned down as each signifier refers to another, infinitely. To be born into and use language means, then, as Terry Eagleton summarises, '[that] I can never have a pure, unblemished meaning or experience at all.'[77]

While female performance artists deliberately grounded their knowledge of 'woman' *in* their own experiences there was an assumption that such experiences both indicated and upheld a 'Truth'. Experience, then, became the ground for a collective political identity. Such a belief does not take into account that all experience (and therefore knowledge and truth) is produced discursively. A performance artist may represent her experience of rape, of motherhood, of menstruation, of death - but what is left unexplored or unremarked is in what ways these experiences are constructed to carry particular meanings, for what purpose and effect, and what (political) subjects they produce in the process. Moreover, if 'truth' is constructed within discourse, then discursively established systems of rules govern what can count as 'truth', and what is 'false', unimaginable or unreasonable.

Experience is always already implicated in the structure of language since it is at the level of language that experience is interpreted, determining what, specifically, that experience is able to mean. If knowledge is based on experience, then understanding experience as always already mediated in and by language problematises this relationship. This is not to deny, however, that every subject does 'really' experience effects, but that experience is, as Joan Scott asserts, 'always already an interpretation and is in need of interpretation.'[78]

Accepting that meanings are the result of discourses (both supporting and competing) it is possible to suggest that they are also, therefore, mutable and liable to change, affected by shifting social, historical, economic and political factors.[79] The questions that then become central are: how do we know what we know and how do we deploy - or challenge - that knowledge; what mechanisms are used to represent it as a 'truth', and who has access to these mechanisms?

Although poststructuralism is now something of a common currency in the academy, much performance art throughout the 1980s to the present day remains tied to explorations of the 'personal' - as if the 'personal' is a mirror of the world, reflecting what life is 'really' like, and perfecting that picture by including more diverse and supposedly truthful representations. The problem with this, however, as Joan Scott writes, is that:

> the project of making experience visible precludes critical examination of the workings of the ideological system itself, its categories of representation (homosexual/heterosexual, man/woman, black/white, as fixed immutable identities), its premises about what these categories mean and how they operate, its notions of subjects, origin, and cause.[80]

This critique of representing the 'self' does not deny that such presentations operate on multivalent levels in complicated ways, often implicitly critiquing many aspects of the

hegemonic society in the process, as observed in Schneemann's performance *Interior Scroll*. However, such presentations do, ultimately, leave intact and unquestioned the system of signification that makes 'woman' mean certain things. Thus, while Schneemann may indeed trouble some of the binaries that structure representation by crossing through them, what such a strategy fails to address is the impossibility of showing what women 'really' are because there is nothing 'natural' or 'immutable' to 'woman'. We can never really know what 'woman' is or will be.

Fractions in the feminist movement began to appear in the late 1970s over this very question of deciding what woman 'is', that reflect vividly that categories are never innocent, but are always implicated in structures of power which determine subjectivity and identity based on notions of difference. To 'be' anything, one must first of all exclude 'others' - in phallocentrism these 'others' are those that are not male, white, heterosexual, middle-class. When feminists begin to define what woman is or should be, although such definitions are primarily dependent on their difference from 'man' (itself a problematic gesture since it both serves to reinforce the binary that separates the two positions, whilst reifying the category 'man'), they also enact other exclusions - exclusions which limit what a woman can be.

Those with the power to define 'woman' reflected their own images - white, female, heterosexual, and middle-class. Differences between women were elided under the cover of a common 'sex', as if identity and an 'authentic self' was rooted only in the female gendered body, in its opposition to the 'male body.' As Anna Davin states of her time in the British feminist movement:

> We knew about class difference, though we thought it could be overcome through working together, but we hardly noticed differences of ethnicity or sexuality, and to the extent that we did, thought it was enough to be 'not

> prejudiced', thereby assuming the different were always other, and 'we' were all the same.[81]

This statement highlights the force of reducing all differences to the Same in the service of imposing a false unity upon individuals. Of course, such a strategy was undoubtedly deliberate, performing the equation between power and numbers.[82] However, this still leaves intact the so-called majority imposing their identities on others. The Same that differences are reduced to is the Same of the dominant group, and thus the feminist movement resembled the hegemonic patriarchy in its ability to make differences disappear - either by outright exclusion or by a resolute blindness to those differences in the first instance.

Similarly, while performances of this period fulfilled an important function in enabling women to speak (at all)[83] one central problem was that speaking 'at all' often became speaking 'for all'. Those that had the power (the greatest access to 'knowledge', representation and therefore the production of 'truth') spoke in their own images, assuming that those images were common and unified. Women who felt that they did not fit in with, or were not addressed by, the feminist conception of the 'female' often left the feminist movement to join other movements perceived to be more aligned to their own positions in society. Alternatively, other groups were established, if not exactly in opposition to the feminist movement, as a corrective to it.

In the USA, from the late 1970s and early 1980s, the focus shifted from the singularity of women's differences to men, to women's differences amongst women, splitting the movement in the process. The racism implicit in white feminism's inability to address differences of race and class was identified as a central blind-spot. As Audre Lorde writes:

> If white american feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us. and the resulting difference in our oppressions, then how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of Color? What is the theory behind racist feminism?[84]

In Britain, the widening cracks in the feminist movement tended to coalesce more around issues of sexuality and class rather than race, as evidenced in the split between radical and socialist feminists. As Anna Davin states:

> I'd probably have seen lesbianism as politically risky - we had to keep the image of feminism clean, so to speak![85]

While such fractionalisation initially enabled differences between women to be asserted and acknowledged, this recourse to identity - in the long run - contains the same intrinsic problem detailed above. Drawing on personal experience serves to legitimate what is known and by whom, with such experience reinforcing identity rather than prompting a questioning of it. The 'experience' of the lesbian, or the black woman, or working class woman is held up as an authentic indicator of 'identity' - a pointer to some inner or reflective authoritative truth - rather than as a result and constituting force of subjectivity. Identity, instead of being seen as constructed, contingent and multiple becomes fixed, absolute and unified.

What is left unasked is how such identities (and the experiences that constitute them) are made to mean, and which discourses are being maintained in the process. To ask these questions demands that performance artists must work from *within* the discourses, critically engaging with their experiences in place of merely re-presenting them. In the words of Joan Scott:

> It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about

which knowledge is produced. To think about experience in this way is to historicize it as well as to historicize the identities it produces.[86]

SECTION TWO

CHAPTER 4
DIFFERENT STRATEGIES - STRATEGIES OF DIFFERENCE

IF NOT THERE THEN...

Through what exclusions has the feminist subject been constructed, and how do those excluded domains return to haunt the 'integrity' and 'unity' of the feminist 'we'?

Judith Butler[1]

The problematisation of the grounds of 'identity', as it is represented in both feminism and women's performance art, necessarily introduces other problems. If one removes the notion of 'the subject' of feminism by unsettling just such a subject, *who* is it that feminists are left fighting for?[2]

***

> you must have a self before you can afford to deconstruct it.[3]
>
> How can anyone ask me to say goodbye to 'emancipatory metanarratives' when my own emancipation is still such a patchy, hit-and-miss affair?[4]

***

Let me contrast the above by revealing the other side of the map:

> Feminist critique ought also to examine how the category of 'women' is produced and represented by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.[5]
>
> The critique of essentialism and all its different forms: humanism, rationalism, universalism, far from being an obstacle to the formulation of a feminist democratic project is indeed the very condition of its possibility.[6]

In the following chapters of this thesis, I aim to shift my focus to the political potential offered by the intersection of contemporary performance art with a deconstructive practice.[7] My own shift here mirrors shifts within contemporary political, philosophical, literary and cultural discourse. Just as the feminist movements of the late 1960s were part of a general movement of cultural contestation, this move to what have variously been described as deconstructive and poststructuralist critical interventions can be located historically and socially within what has come to be loosely defined as 'postmodernism'. As stated in chapter 1, I do not intend here to enter the debate into what postmodernism is, or even whether there is such a 'thing' *as* postmodernism, since although the term is now something of a common currency, it remains impossible to provide a stable definition of the term, particularly since - and some would say appropriately - it proliferates beyond 'control'. Dick Hebdige's critical citing of the term 'postmodernism' reflects the vastness of its descriptive range:

> the decor of a room, the design of a building, the diegesis of a film, the construction of a record [...], a TV commercial, or an arts documentary, or the 'intertextual' relations between them [...], an anti-teleological tendency within epistemology, the attack on the 'metaphysics of presence'[...], the 'predicament' of reflexivity, a group of rhetorical tropes, a proliferation of surfaces, a new phase in commodity fetishism, a fascination for 'images', codes and styles, a process of cultural, political or existential fragmentation and/or crisis, the 'de-centring' of the subject, an 'incredulity towards meta-narratives', the replacement of unitary power axes by a pluralism of power/discourse formations, the 'implosion of meaning', the collapse of cultural hierarchies [...], the functioning and effects of the new miniaturized technologies, broad societal and economic shifts into a 'media', 'consumer' or 'multinational' phase [....][8]

Hebdige's critical citing of 'postmodernism' is not intended to suggest that the term has become useless through being overloaded with signification, but that it has become a 'keyword', and as such, suggests that 'a significant number of people with conflicting interests and opinions feel that there is something sufficiently important at stake here to be worth struggling and arguing over.'[9]

Thus, while it may be impossible to fully determine precisely what 'postmodernism' is, it is still possible to assert that there has been a general cultural shift in the West within the last fifty years, a shift indicated by that term, and this shift can be detected in a number of different realms. Thus, within political, philosophical and literary idioms, the term 'postmodernism' could be said to mark the 'deaths' of the Subject, the Author, Reason, and Truth, as each of these is deconstructed to reveal the operations that enable them to function as cohesive - and productive - systems of knowledge. Similarly, the 'death' of modernist Enlightenment is pronounced, arising from various quarters - for some the event of the Holocaust destroyed any notion of 'progress' and 'rationality'; for others, the concept of, and processes connected to, the Enlightenment belief were revealed to operate by way of a system of exclusions in which the very notion of 'human progress' was achieved through the dehumanisation, marginalisation or invisibility of other (typically non-Western, non-white, non-male) subjects. Tied to such critiques of the Enlightenment are those which reveal the partiality of so-called objective science and its claim to truth, producing a general distrust of any all-embracing explanations or 'grand narratives', including Marxism (a distrust strengthened by the perceived 'failure' of socialism). Such resistance to, and contestations of, metanarratives have themselves been aided by earlier resistance movements, including the Black, Gay and Lesbian, and Women's Movements, each of which offered an alternative perspective on 'the world'. In addition, the 'end' of colonialism has produced a decentering of the West, as well as a critical engagement with its colonialist history and its discursive formations.

In cultural and economic terms, postmodernism tends to refer to the explosion of technology and information, and the expansion of consumer capitalism, linked with concepts of globalisation and the fragmentation of the subject. Images of consumer

lifestyles and identities are continuously and ceaselessly produced with new images and products endlessly replacing 'old' ones. 'Communities' are no longer perceived to be geographically located, or based on class relations, since so-called 'communities' are now seen to be dispersed across the globe, aided by technological advancements. Equally, the 'bosses' or owners of capital are no longer easily identified as global capitalism enables multi-national expansion, dissolving any sense of central operation. When one company owns a number of other companies, all with their own products and 'identities', located in numerous other countries, identification of 'the enemy' and any resistance to them becomes more difficult.

All of these engagements, whether located in political, philosophical, cultural, social or literary discourse, suggest that - although the term 'postmodern' belies cohesive description (a situation which is, indeed, one effect *of* postmodern dispersal) - as Jane Flax asserts, 'Something has happened'.

> Something has happened, is happening, to Western societies. [...] Western culture is in the middle of a fundamental transformation; a 'shape of life' is growing old. The demise of the old is being hastened by the end of colonialism, the uprising of women, the revolt of other cultures against white Western hegemony, shifts in the balance of economic and political power within the world economy, and a growing awareness of the costs as well as the benefits of scientific and technological 'progress'.[10]

This chapter, then, seeks to locate feminism within this transformation - as both a part of and a response to the 'postmodern' (Western?) world, and as a critical resource with which to engage with this world.

An evident tension that exists between feminisms and deconstructions is that the former are, first and foremost, political practices which have always had a common desired *aim* - the emancipation of women. The latter, in contrast, are *strategies with no assumed end points*. Deconstructive manoeuvres do not attempt to replace one form of knowledge with another, guaranteed to be better. While acknowledging this, I would

argue that the placing of feminism alongside deconstruction does not preclude the possibility of imagining a different future (change remains both possible and desirable). Such an interrelationship, however, resists fixing or deciding in advance what that difference will be, or believing that we will - once and for always - arrive there. The 'aim', then, acknowledging that there is no absolute, or 'final solution', is that of a continual becoming, a process which is necessarily open to continuous contestation and renogotiation.

> Deconstruction is better understood as a questioning of the terms in which we understand the political, rather than as a simple negation of the political.[11]

What might feminism refracted through deconstruction look like, and what would be the benefits - for feminism - of such a connection? As stated in the previous chapter, since the 1970s the various feminisms have come under attack for under-representing, misrepresenting or not representing 'other' women - that is, women who are not included within the feminist movement, be they women of colour, working class women, lesbians, differently abled women, etc. etc. Importantly, I deliberately use the 'etc.' at the end of that last sentence because if one wishes to list the 'others' then that list continues to be endless. One can never hope to fully include all the differences, because we do not yet know what those differences even are, or in the words of Diane Elam, '*what women will have been*.' Thus, any attempt to be fully inclusive is an impossible task. In the following pages I wish to concentrate on Elam's deliberately unstable linking of the feminist and the deconstructive.[12] Elam is not the only theorist who does this, but I think she is worth citing in that she goes beyond highlighting the potential of deconstruction for feminists, to actually positing a relationship between them that maintains the political *activity* of the earlier feminist movement.[13]

Elam suggests that definitions of women produce the *abyme*:

> each new attempt to determine women does not put an end to feminist questioning but only makes us more aware of the infinite possibilities of women. That is to say, women may be represented, but the attempt to represent them exhaustively only makes us more aware of the failure of such attempts. Hence the infinite regression that I specifically call the *'ms. en abyme.'*[14]

Furthermore, while new representations are added to the abyme, previous representations are also changed, as the present impacts our reading of the past.[15] The abyme fills up with ever more descriptions of women, but these are only other representations. There is no point at which the *abyme* will be filled up and we can know what woman is, as 'a feminism that believes it knows what a woman is and what she can do both forecloses the limitless possibilities of women and misrepresents the various forms that social injustice can take'.[16] We can never really know what 'woman' is because she is a '*permanently contested site of meaning*'.[17] Importantly, because the *abyme* can never fully, once and for all, be filled, the 'object' of the *abyme* can never be entirely grasped, resulting in a destabilising of subject/object relations. Without a stable object, the subject itself is left unstable. For Elam, feminism must be a politics of undecidability, where the category of woman is continuously kept as a question, without the imposition of an end point which would already presume closure to the question. How, though, can one reconcile a politics of undecidability with a politics of action? Does political action not depend upon certainty and consensus?

Elam's radical proposition is that the ground of politics should not be that of common identity, since identity politics are a dangerous politics in that they suppress or erase differences between women, homogenising such differences and enforcing uniformity or conformity. Alternatively, where differences *are* acknowledged, there is a tendency to hierarchise them, placing people into positions of the 'most worthy', which tends to divide people rather than create a 'community'. Equally, individuals become

representatives of those differences and are only granted the authority to speak of them.

In the words of Trinh Minh-ha:

> Now, i am not only given the permission to open up and talk, i am also encouraged to express my difference. My audience expects and demands it; otherwise people would feel as if they have been cheated: we did not come to hear a Third World member speak of the First (?) World; we came to listen to that voice of difference likely to bring us *what we can't have* and to divert us from the monotony of sameness.[18]

Additionally, the person who is 'different' is assumed to represent the entire category of that difference. While there is a problem in the feminist movement of the early 1960s in that it refused to recognise differences in the hope of a united 'Sisterhood', it is, as is apparent from the above, equally problematic to treat difference in some essentialist way, as a groundable, stable truth. Difference can too easily become 'a tool of segregation [...]'.[19]

Aiming at the heart of identity politics, Minh-ha raises the spectre of the fabricated unified subject (a subject which is, moreover, dependent for its constitution on external others):

> Of all the layers that form the open (never finite) totality of 'I', which is to be filtered out as superfluous, fake, corrupt, and which is to be called pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic? Which indeed, since all interchange, revolving in an endless process.[20]

Peggy Phelan furthers the debate on identity politics by questioning the political efficacy of being 'visible' in the first place. For Phelan, 'visibility is a trap' which 'provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession.'[21] Moreover, the joining of identity with visibility presumes that identities can be visibly perceived, that what you see is what you are, that the more visible you are, the more powerful you are, that the 'self' can be fully represented which, as already shown, is an impossibility.

In place of the identity politics which for so long have grounded feminist political action, Elam proposes instead a politics of *groundless solidarity*, 'in which a coalition is formed by people who are suspicious of any such claims to identity.'[22] Similarly, Judith Butler proposes that the subject of feminism, 'women', 'designates an undesignated field of differences, one that cannot be totalised or summarised by a descriptive identity', enabling the term to become 'a site of permanent openness and resignifiability'.[23]

This shift in political practice is fundamental in that politics usually places the subject as central, and political practice as determined by gaining the assumed 'rights' of that subject. As Elam states, the

> question becomes that of deciding which rights are the natural and inalienable property of a given subject. Accordingly, the problem of rights becomes a matter of description: what rights belong to which subjects?[24]

However, if one understands subjectivity as being produced in language and discourse, then so too must one understand that any notion of 'rights' is tied into and contributes to this construction of the individual subject. That is, 'rights produce subjects who can hold them.'[25] There is nothing natural about either rights or the subjects who are supposed to have them. Both are equally constructs of particular historical and social positionings. A deconstructive approach to politics would therefore 'turn its attention to the way in which rights actually construct the political subjects who are entitled to those rights'.[26] For Elam, then, a feminist politics must not be a politics that is grounded on notions of essential, unchanging rights, but a politics of undecidability, where each political action or decision must be made anew. Anything else would risk establishing a totalising - and therefore equally oppressive - discourse.[27]

How, though, does one arrive at a decision? Equally, is there not a danger in this groundless undecidability in that all political practice and decisions will be subsumed

under an 'anything goes' because I have decided something? Where is the ground of decision making located when the grounds of identity and rights have been destabilised?

Jane Flax, while supportive of the deconstructive (or postmodern in her terms) strategy of destabilising totalising discourse, argues that such ideas 'have not offered adequate concepts of or spaces for the practice of justice'.[28] It is precisely to the concept of justice that Elam turns when calling on a feminist *ethics*, with the proviso that one must always strive for justice, even though 'justice remains unrepresentable, [...] it is impossible to do justice to justice, to carry out one's responsibility entirely`.[29]

For Elam, this question of justice is answered by recourse to a politics of undecidability which must additionally 'engage with ethics and consider *obligations* and *responsibilities*'.[30] The ethics that Elam proposes are not the Kantian ethics of the autonomous, impartial, rational subject but an ethics, in line with deconstruction, that moves away from the centrality of the subject. The subject is not autonomous but is caught up in a *network of relations* and therefore has a responsibility to those relations. Moreover, there can be no absolute rationale for deciding what is true or false, good or bad, since such judgements are already caught up in established discourses, where the rules are already pre-determined. Therefore,

> rather than judging on the basis of a system of rules political activism becomes the search for the rule that may do justice to the case. [... W]e have to do the right thing, here, now, where we are.[31]

However, as we can never know that we have made the right decision, the right judgement, all political actions are open to negotiation, to conflict, to different decisions.[32] The rules are not fixed for eternity, but are liable to continuously change as each 'rule` is contested by another specific situation. `Just as there are no grounds for ethical judgements, there also is no end to judgement.`[33]

How, though, might this notion of a feminism without a grounded subject be embraced within feminist performance art? Again we return to the questions of who has the power to grant meaning to what and for what purpose? Representation is inherently political:

> Whether the medium be linguistic or visual, we are always dealing with systems of meaning operating within certain codes and conventions that are socially produced and historically conditional.[34]

One function of a deconstructive art, then, is perhaps to de-naturalise the seemingly natural, revealing it as a discursive construction that has a specific located history, while resisting offering up a supposedly more 'natural' (truthful) image. The remaining chapters of this thesis are concerned with the ways in which women's performance art has shifted from a performance of grounded 'identity' (of woman), towards a destabilising of the subject 'woman', while continuing to operate within a feminist framework. In the rest of this chapter I will return to the question of the personal within performance art in an attempt to determine ways in which the 'personal narrative' can be simultaneously drawn on and destabilised through using particular performative strategies. As the personal continues to feature within performance art pieces by women, I feel that it is crucial to examine the means of using the personal while resisting positing a fixed, essential subject. In Chapter 5 I will shift my focus to performances which trouble the representation of 'woman'. Both of these chapters attempt to show the ways in which each performer works within discourse, occupying, respectively, the position of 'femininity', the inappropriate place of 'woman', a place that stands beside (and therefore 'outside') the inscription of 'woman', and a place in which 'woman' remains unmarked. Chapters 6 and 7 broaden the horizons of this thesis by examining

the work of lesbian and black performance artists, identifying moments in which sexual and racial identity are both inscribed and de-essentialised.

DRAWING ON *DRAWING ON A MOTHER'S EXPERIENCE* (1988 - 1989)[35]

And identity is funny being yourself is funny as you are never yourself to yourself except as you remember yourself and then of course you do not believe yourself. That is really the trouble with an autobiography you do not of course you do not really believe yourself why should you, you know so well so very well that it is not yourself, it could not be yourself because you cannot remember right and if you do remember right it does not sound right and of course it does not sound right because it is not right. You are of course never yourself.

Gertrude Stein[36]

I have seen Bobby Baker's performance, *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* (1988- 89). Or, at least, I think I have. I know I have watched a video recording of it. But I think I have also seen it. Years ago. I cannot be sure. I do not have the programme as testimony to my having been there. I have no notes scribbled during it, for at that time I would have no need for scribbling notes, not knowing then that there would be a now when I would (re)turn to this performance. But in my mind's eye I remember myself being there, in that space. It is possible, however, that I am projecting myself into the documentational video recording of the event. Making myself believe that I was there. Making it more 'real'. I would like to think that the following is an amalgamation of memories, those culled from both seeing it live and seeing it recorded. I could be deluded and deluding. Memory has a habit of playing funny tricks.

[Insert the documentational video tape into the video recorder. Press Play]

My name's Bobby Baker.

[Pause Tape]

Let's return to that later.

[Stage Description]

Bobby Baker has entered the performance space wearing a white lab-type coat (just-below-knee length), and low wedged heel shoes - the picture of order and tidiness. conjuring up simultaneously the images (in my memory?) of a home economics teacher (I cannot remember her name), and a scientific demonstrator (cultural archetype), both symbols (to me) of authority and knowledge. Neat, clean, hyper-functional. No unnecessary fuss or mess.

In each hand Bobby Baker is carrying a large plastic bag stuffed to capacity. While the order suggested by her appearance is maintained by the fact that the bags are identical, this order is equally troubled by the very presence of these bags. Plastic. Ordinary. Domestic. Menial. Associated with the act of 'shopping', not the act of expertly 'displaying'. As I watch her walk into the space, weighed down by two large, full shopping bags, I cannot help but imagine a woman struggling home with the weekly family provisions or the woman sitting alone on a pavement surrounded by her belongings stuffed into disposable plastic. Disposable plastic for a disposable life. The 'bag lady'/ 'mother'/'Bobby Baker' conflate in my mind.

[Play]

I'm going to be making a drawing tonight so I hope you can all see.

[Pause Tape]

Like the considerate demonstrator, Baker tells us what to expect and puts our own concerns first - 'I hope you can all see.' And yet does this 'see' not have a double take.

a seeing again, seeing through? Literally, she hopes we can all see what she does, for if we cannot, she might as well do it alone. But will we be able to *see*, in the sense of make sense, see beyond?

[Play]

> *It's about my experiences as a mother.*

[Stop. Rewind]

> *I'm going to be making a drawing for you tonight so I hope you can all see. It's about my experiences as a mother.*

[Pause Tape]

The binary that Baker is breaching has been established. Baker is the Artist/Mother. The Madonna (Mother) and child is the most frequent 'object' of painting. In Baker's performance, the mother comes out of the frame and represents *herself* - without the child. The paradox implicit here is that the mother is represented *as* artist, rather than as object of art. The mother, stepping out of the frame, has become a subject. A question that is simultaneously foregrounded is what is a mother without her child/ren? Can one represent the 'mother' without those that position her in that location being present? Is the mother only valuable as a relational symbol - mother *and* child?

[Play]

> *I'm rather an experienced mother. I've got eight years experience. Eight and a bit. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to do any live work for quite a lot of that time so I'm not quite so experienced a performer.*

[Pause Tape]

In return for becoming an experienced mother, Baker's experience as an artist is put on hold. She is unable to be both. And yet, presumably she is still a mother, and she is also performing, here, in front of me. She is an artist-mother-artist. She is an artist using her experience as a mother to make her art. She is a mother using her experience as an artist

to make her mothering into art. She is doing what she thought/was told she could not do.

[Read]

> What happened was that I could not allow myself to be an artist because there was absolutely no precedent within my family that I could carry on acting as an individual, from that moment on I should devote myself to my family, my children and my husband.[37]

[Play]

> *I'm a bit rusty so if you'll bear with me.*

[Pause Tape]

She appeals to our sympathy, asks for our approval, makes allowances for herself. Self-deprecates. Self-depreciated. There is a niggling doubt embedded within her appeals that she should not be here, has no right.

[Play]

> *Now what I'm going to begin with is laying down this plastic sheet on the floor which is quite a difficult bit. This is to avoid mess. Extra mess. Because one discovers quite early on, as an intelligent mother, that if you think ahead, you can save yourself a lot of work.*

[Pause Tape]

The skills involved in 'mothering' are introduced. It is through experience that one learns the skills, such as time-saving devices. Such skills do not come naturally. The 'mother' is the result of the experience of mothering.

[Play]

> *And there is a lot of work involved in being a mother.*

[Pause Tape]

'Mothering' as 'real work' is highlighted. And the plastic sheet that Baker unfolds onto the floor connotes such work - difficult.

[Stage description]

Baker has placed a clear sheet of plastic paper on the floor in the centre of the space.

[Fast Forward. Play]

> *And on top of this I lay, I'm afraid, not a brand new sheet for this occasion. When I did my first performances earlier this year for a long time I did use a new sheet but this one's been well-washed.*

[Pause Tape]

The bubble that this performance is just for us, for me, for now, has been burst. She has been an artist-mother-artist before. I do not own this performance, others will see it. have already seen it. And now Baker does not even consider this event to be special enough to warrant a new sheet.

[Play]

> *This is the good thing about drawing on a sheet because you can wash it afterwards.*

[Pause Tape]

The 'good' mother is resourceful. 'Waste not want not.' The 'artist' is decommodifying art - the art that she makes is disposable, erasable, impermanent. Wash the sheet, and it disappears.

[Play]

> *I think, to be truthful, I'm going to throw this one away.*

[Pause Tape]

The 'good' mother image is beginning to dissolve. She is not *that* perfect. And if this is the 'truth' was all that preceded it the 'untruth'?

[Play]

> *Or what I thought I might do, since it's art, is sell it.*

[Pause Tape]

The mother who washes has now been eclipsed by the artist who sells - the commercially minded artist.

[Play]

Or give it to someone who needs a sheet or a drawing.

[Pause Tape]

The 'giving'/caring' mother has returned. As she does so, the 'value' of art is raised - is a drawing or a sheet more important? Can one be said to be more valuable than the other? Does it depend on what one's needs are? Does the one without a sheet value the sheet over the art? If a mother needs to provide for her children, does art become an inessential luxury? How do we put a price on art?

[Stage Description]

Baker unfolds the white sheet and lays it on top of the plastic one.

[Thoughts rushing through my mind.]

Sheet = Bed = Place of intercourse = Conception = Birth = Hospital = Confinement.

[Play]

Now, I'm going to get a bit sweaty now but I have to unpack everything. I have to really concentrate so I get it right.

[Pause Tape]

The controlled image of the neat demonstrator is beginning to leak at the edges of the body's boundaries. The material body is making its presence visibly known. One cannot escape bodily fluids, no matter how much the images of advertising try and make them disappear.

Body + Birth = Sweat, Blood, and Tears.

Concentrate.

[Read and Compare]

> Acconci's insistence on presenting 'the body as a system, sweating and spermatic, faecal and salivating' exposes the existence of social structures designed to make us forget all those things, as well as their own failure really to maintain cleanliness...[38]

[Stage Description]

Baker starts unpacking things from the bags and laying them in particular places around the edge of the sheet - buckets, food mixer, bottles, jars.

[Play]

> *But I'll try and keep you occupied.*

[Pause Tape]

The mother must entertain us - the children.

[Fast Forward. Play]

> *Because I know we are a sophisticated artistically aware audience, I'm going to try and keep in tune with that for you. You needn't worry too much about it going over your heads.*

[Pause Tape]

Baker ironically sends up both the art world and us, the audience, as part of that art world. We may know about the world of 'art', but do we know about the world of 'mothering'? By joining the two, Baker hopes to afford us an insight into the latter.

[Play]

> *I suppose it's quite interesting watching somebody concentrate and work hard.*

[Pause Tape]

The invisible work of 'mothering' is revealed and foregrounded.

[Play]

> *I'll tell you what I'll do. I will set this timer so that I don't go too long because I think I need to keep this fairly snappy.*

[Pause Tape]

The time of the mother is fully accounted for and hard-pressed. There is no time to waste. The performer, equally, understands performance strategies.

[Fast Forward. Play]

> *I'm afraid something else I must point out, and I'm very glad I remembered this, because it has been pointed out to me by important people, since my last show, that this is slightly autobiographical. Totally autobiographical, and I mean that, and I thought that was all right because I felt I needed to get something off my ... out of my system you might say, and that occasionally it's all right to dwell on something.*

[Rewind. Play.]

> *this is slightly autobiographical. Totally autobiographical, and I mean that*

[Pause Tape]

Which is it? Slightly/Totally. Which is which? What does she mean? This is slightly/totally drawn from the life of Bobby Baker (and we'll come to 'herself' later). Drawn from the experiences of Bobby Baker, the mother. A literal drawing of the experiences of Bobby Baker the mother. Drawing on/from those experiences. And do I believe her anyway? Can I distinguish autobiography from fiction? Is there a distinction to be drawn?

[Fast forward. Play]

> *But I got very worried because I read a review in the Guardian, of course, about the Edinburgh Festival. There was some heavy criticism about all these shows by aspiring artists which smacked of the confessional box, and I blushed. This is just what I was about to do,*

[Pause Tape]

Of course, the Guardian, a middle-class 'quality' paper. Of course, we, this audience, are aware of the Guardian and its status as 'quality' paper - liberal, middle-class.

The 'confessional box': if her performance is a confession, then the space of this performance is the confessional box, and we, by association, are positioned as the

'priests', ready to listen and absolve, to free, let her get it off her ... (eclipsed word = chest) ... out of her system.

[Read]

> Since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on *for the production of truth* [....] [N]ext to the testing rituals, next to the testimony of witnesses, and the learned methods of observation and demonstration, *the confession became one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth.* We have since become a singularly confessing society.[39]

Through this performance she will 'produce a truth'.

> The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile;[40] a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him [*sic*]; it unburdens him [*sic*] of his [*sic*] wrongs, liberates him [*sic*], and promises him [*sic*] salvation.[41]

And this is just what she was about to do. Slightly? Totally? Revealing of the 'self' - in public - recognition of oneself, in public, in print, - revealing and recognising - causing to blush. Embarrassment at the recognition.

[Read]

> Perhaps it is a uniquely British characteristic to have an intimate relationship with embarrassment. If so, Baker subtly elevates this relationship into a revealing characteristic. Hovering at the edge of her revelations, her embarrassment suffuses the moment of public declaration.[42]

[Fast forward.]

Nearly there, don't worry, I've got a jay cloth. Damp.

[Pause Tape]

If there is any mess we can rest assured that she will clean it up. Everything in its proper place. Embarrassment wiped clean away.

[Play]

> *Now, I don't want to embarrass you too much with sort of nasty details about childbirth, I'm really not into that,*

[Pause Tape]

Childbirth is a 'nasty detail' and we are to be spared. Because we will be embarrassed about the details, and they are maybe not so easily washed away with a damp jay cloth. And if she does reveal these details to us, will we able to look at the 'mother' before us - in her clean white lab coat and neatly bobbed hair - in the same light as before? Is there a danger of being overwhelmed by the details? Sweat's one thing but the bodily fluids of birthing are another, and these are to be kept dammed up in her body's memory. No seepage here, please, we're British.

[Play]

> *but when my first baby was born we moved house on the same day which was not the best planned thing to do. The day before I'd asked these friends over to help us move, pack, you know. And I obviously started, the labour started, and I'd got this lovely lunch ready for them, which - well, for me - roast beef, cold potato salad and chives - fresh chives - and strawberries and cream. But as it happened I couldn't really share in the meal which really annoyed me but then things slowed down and in the end I went to the hospital in the middle of the night, had a baby - oh, I forgot, I was going to start my drawing with this very first meal at the onset of birth.*

[Pause Tape]

The details of giving birth are replaced by the details of providing food, the one substituting for the other - in each case, Baker is the provider, the nurturer. We cannot deal with 'birth' but we can deal with roast beef, potatoes and fresh chives, strawberries and cream. The details of the meal are provided whereas the details of the birth are elided - reduced to a mere 'had a baby'.

[Stage description]

Baker takes a Tupperware dish - indexical (and parodic) of the orderly housewife - and removes slices of roast beef from it, pressing each one into a corner of the sheet.

[Thoughts rushing through my head.]

Sheet = Tablecloth = Dinner Party = Dinner Conversation [does not] = Experience of giving birth.

[Play]

> *Just delicately beginning at the corner with a little roast beef, and you needn't worry, this won't be wasted, I shall find a good home for it.*

[Pause (Tape) - for thought.]

It would be a crying shame to waste good food. Remembering the blackmail used to ensure that I ate everything on my plate - 'There's starving children in India.'

Food. Evoker of memories. The first taste of a particular food, the place, people, smell, emotion, touch. Gateway to the past.

[Read]

> Food consumption habits are not simply tied to biological needs but serve to mark boundaries between social classes, geographic regions, nations, cultures, genders, life-cycle stages, religions and occupations, to distinguish rituals, traditions, festivals, seasons and times of day.[43]

(I never used to like coffee, now I love it, I had never tried an avocado until I was 22, I tried asparagus for the first time last year and was embarrassed (read British?) because I did not know how to eat it, I have yet to try an oyster, I still do not like olives, my dad is a meat and two veg man, I have been a vegetarian for ten years, although I do eat fish.)

Roast beef - cooked the night Baker went into labour and now the signifier of that experience. I wonder if every time she eats roast beef she remembers giving birth? I wonder if she can still eat it at all?

Food.

A liminal substance. Before being eaten it is outside the body. Nature. Once eaten it is inside the body. If prepared in any way it is transformed from nature into culture. (Is this, then, the one place where women are 'allowed' to be cultural producers - to turn

nature into culture? I'll chew on this.) Once inside the body it has to pass to the outside again. It traverses the body's boundaries, belonging neither strictly to the inside nor outside but both. When we incorporate food it is made part of us. It is our self. Matter transformed into self. Reminiscent of the foetus carried in the body of the pregnant mother - it is both of her and not of her; it has come from the outside and is now on the inside. It will shortly be back on the outside. Food, like the child, passes through the body. It is the abject and the cause of abjection.

[Read]

> It is [...] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.[44]

***

If we did not suspect it before, from the objects that Baker placed around the white sheet, we know it now - the drawing she is going to make is a drawing composed from food. In a Jackson Pollock/Yves Klein parody, Baker will use the marks of food to map out her experiences of being a mother. Food is the link to memories of those experiences.

Food as Art? Food vs Art?

Food/Art. Mother/Artist. Woman/Artist.

Food-Art, Mother-Artist, Woman-Artist.

Food preparation is arguably conceptualised as a feminine task. (Thus, perhaps the 'art' of food, the 'art' displayed here, does not trouble the binaries as much as I'd like. I will return to this problematic situation later.) Eating food brings to the fore the body. And embodiment. The mind/body binary is raised again. Along with the others. Nature/culture, man/woman, civilised/animal.

[Read]

> Food intrudes into the 'clean' purity of rational thought because of its organic nature. Food is unclean, a highly unstable substance; it is messy and dirty in its preparation, its disposal and its by-products; it inevitably decays, it has odours. Delicious food is only hours or days away from rotting matter, or excreta. As a result, disgust is never far away from the pleasures of food and eating. Food continually threatens to become dirt.[45]

Is this, then, why women are the ones who most typically 'create' food? (An interesting observation, however, is that 'great' chefs are men, and yet cooking is conceived as a 'female task'. Do chefs 'create' while women merely 'cook'?)

> The practice of cooking has [...] received little serious scholarly attention because of its transitory nature and link with physical labour and the servicing of bodies rather than with 'science', 'art' or 'theory'. Cooking is identified as a practical activity, enmeshed in the physical temporal world. It is therefore regarded as base and inferior compared with intellectual or spiritual activities.[46]

So, cooking is not 'culture', because it is a 'necessary act'.

[Rewind. Play]

beginning at the corner with a little roast beef,

[Pause Tape. Memory]

Roast Beef = Sunday dinner = Family.

Fitting, then, that Baker's first addition to the 'family' - indeed, the addition that will 'make' the family, is marked with the iconography of a family meal.[47] Indeed, the painting starts at the corner, and the corner is therefore the entry point into all the experiences Baker is about to draw. Prior to the roast beef mark, the sheet is an 'empty page', awaiting inscription.

Similarly, prior to giving birth, Baker has no mother's experience on which she can draw. The roast beef marks not only the entry into the drawing, but Baker's entry into

motherhood and her exit from non-motherhood. The meat therefore is a boundary mark, dividing Baker's life into a before/after.

[Alternative thought]

Roast Beef = Meat = Animal.

[Read]

> Meat is a prime example of a foodstuff which attracts conflicting meanings of 'goodness' and 'badness' in western society. [...] The sign 'meat' encompasses the meanings of power, virility, aggression, passion, strength and masculinity. Its bloodiness symbolizes life, deeds of violence, discordance, family ties, the passions and sacred power, but also signifies 'self'. As part of an animal, it represents humanity's control over the natural world [....] Despite its exalted status, meat is also the source of ambivalence by virtue of its linking with animals and blood; it has the potential to repulse and disgust, and approaches taboo.[48]
>
> ***
>
> She set down her knife and fork. She felt that she had turned rather pale and hoped that Peter wouldn't notice. 'This is ridiculous,' she lectured herself. 'Everyone eats cows, its natural; you have to eat to stay alive, meat is good for you, it has lots of proteins and minerals.' She picked up her fork, speared a piece, lifted it, and set it down again.
> Peter raised his head, smiling. 'Christ I was hungry,' he said, 'I sure was glad to get that steak inside. A good meal always makes you feel a little more human.'[49]
>
> ***

[Fast Forward. Play. Stage Description.]

Baker makes an imprint with the roast beef in the corner of the sheet, then replaces the meat back into the Tupperware box.

[Play]

> *Pop it back in the box. Anyway, I'm going to clear up as I go along. Something I've learnt.*

[Pause Tape]

Reminiscent of a 1950s 'Good Housekeeper' demonstrator, Baker maintains a tidy, proper workspace. Clearing up as she goes along, Baker will save herself time; another part of the learning curve of 'becoming' a mother; one is not born a mother, but becomes

one. As she saves time, however, she also erases the traces of her work - her work as a mother and as an artist. At the end, what will be left in each case (again, reminiscent of a Pollock painting) is the 'product' of her work and not the process.

[Play]

> *Well, as I said, our daughter was born in the morning and it was the beginning of a wonderful new life for us. But it was a bit of a shock because we had to go straight back to our new house which was in rather a mess. But anyway we managed. And I'm moving straight on to feeding because I feel it is terribly important.*

[Pause Tape]

'A wonderful new life': reading this retrospectively I am struck by how little there is within the performance that is 'wonderful'.

No mention of the birth, no details, just 'moving straight on'...

[Play]

> *Some people think that love is the most important and obviously it is really, but at the time all one really thinks of is feeding. I was one of those lucky people who can breast feed. In fact I did produce a little bit too much milk. I think it was just a sort of need to justify myself. I won't embarrass you anymore about that. I sent the milk to a premature baby's unit.*

[Pause Tape]

Again, the woman as provider/nurturer is foregrounded. However, in this instance, she is *excessively* so, producing excess bodily fluids. She is no longer an artist, and therefore has to justify herself as a mother - by producing more than is required, by nurturing more than her own child.

Breast milk - not only food, but food that comes from the inside to out, in a reversal of the usual procedure - comes directly from the inside of one body, to be drawn out of that body and taken into the body of another - food passed directly from the inside of one body to the inside of another body, a kind of external imaging of the umbilical cord,

attaching the foetus to the placenta. An extremely liminal substance where boundaries of the body merge. And an intrinsically erotic image of the infant sucking on the breast, eating up the mother, the smell, the taste, the touch, the demand. 'I won't embarrass you anymore about that.'

[Read]

> the female body has been constructed not only as a lack or an absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as a formless flow; as viscosity, entrapping, secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment - not a cracked or porous vessel, like a leaking ship, but a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order.[50]
>
> ***
>
> These movements cannot be described as the passage from a beginning to an end. These rivers flow into no single, definitive sea. These streams are without fixed banks, this body without fixed boundaries. This unceasing mobility. This life - which will perhaps be called our restlessness, whims, pretences, or lies. All this remains very strange to anyone claiming to stand on solid ground.[51]
>
> ***

MAYBE I'M READING TOO MUCH INTO IT.

[Play]

> *I used to store it in bottles like this - don't worry, this isn't really it, this is sterilised milk and water - and freeze it.*

[Pause Tape]

Would we 'worry' if it was? - the image of the breast, of the milk, of the mother.

[Read]

> The satisfaction of the erotogenic zone is associated, in the first instance, with the satisfaction of the need for nourishment. To begin with, sexual activity attaches itself to one of the functions serving the purpose of self-preservation and does not become independent of them until later. No one who has seen a baby sinking back satiated from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as a prototype of the expression of sexual satisfaction in later life.[52]

Breast milk. Liminal. Abject. The fascinating thing about abjection is that we both desire it and yet are repulsed by it.

[Read]

> It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. [...] Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsions places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.[53]

In citing a source of abjection, Kristeva herself recalls to memory the sight and feel of a *skin on the surface of milk.*[54]

[Play]

> *So I thought it would be quite good to do a little bit of drawing down the side.*

[Stage Description]

Baker dribbles the milk down the sides of the sheet.

[Pause Tape]

The drawing is framed by milk, symbolic of breast milk, which is a boundary substance of the body, both inside/outside, and a boundary substance of the mother/child. The milk, here, also literally enacts a boundary - erecting a frame between what is inside the picture and what is external to it. However, boundaries seep into one another, just as the milk, a fluid, necessarily seeps into the cloth, blurring any notion of a neat frame. The breast milk, then, is a remarkably fitting symbol of this whole troubling of inside/outside distinctions, marking onto the drawing Baker's experiences as a mother, with that which lies 'outside' of the milk's frame (of reference) indicating Baker's previous non-mother status. However, even when not a mother, there is a cultural assumption that a woman will become a mother and the societal conditioning that begins in early childhood paves the way for this assumed eventuality. Again the mother/not mother is not a distinct division, as both are housed in the body of woman.

[Fast Forward. Play.]

> *Well, one thing that you never realise until you've got a baby, because nobody ever tells you, is that it's very important that somebody feeds you because you're using a lot of energy and you're expected to feed yourself usually. I was. My mother lives rather a long way away, and my husband was at work.*

[Pause Tape]

Who nurtures the nurturer? The first person to be mentioned is the mother - another mother - the one who is assumed to be the primary nurturer, even when the 'child' is an adult. Once a woman is a mother she is always a mother. There is no going back. Similarly, one is always, in a certain sense, a child.

Or perhaps Baker's status as 'new' mother returns her to the state of childhood - an infant in the land of mothering.

The second person to be mentioned is the husband. But he is at 'work'. He is outwith the domestic setting and therefore cannot fill the role of care-giver. Baker establishes the separate spheres - he is at work, she is not (although of course she is). He cannot nurture her because he is somewhere else. The 'father' is entirely absent from this scene.

[Play]

> *My mother did come over whenever she could and she brought me frozen fish pies, which she felt was a good thing, nourishing, freezes well*

[Pause Tape]

Baker returns us to the mother - not the husband. And the mother of the mother fulfils her role by providing 'good', 'nourishing' and 'practical' food.

[Read]

> Symbolically, in the context of the family, the preparation and serving of food, while not generally conceptualized as a commodity, may also be regarded as a potent sign of love and duty.[55]

The mother is doubled here, and ghosted by a third - both mothers are nurturing their daughter - who, it is (generally) assumed, will herself become a mother.[56]

[Play]

so we have a few of those. I'm going to introduce them to the picture.

[Fast forward. Play.]

My mother used orange bread crumbs but I couldn't bring myself to.

[Pause Tape]

Is this because Baker, for aesthetic reasons, does not want breadcrumbs in her picture, or is it her mark of 'independence', separating her (again) from the mother she has just introduced to us? Either way, Baker is (re)insisting on her autonomy from her mother.

[Play]

It's quite sort of bland. Easy to digest. I have to admit that I found Guinness to be slightly more nourishing. I read in a book that it was good for the feeding mother and I never liked it before but when I tried it I discovered that I liked it very much.

[Stage Description]

Baker pours some brown liquid from a glass bottle into a glass, and takes a drink.

I don't like it anymore. I was told that about a pint a day was right. I found about four was nearer the mark.

[Pause Tape]

Like other bodies, the maternal body is caught-up in a network of discourses - scientific, medical, familial. The maternal body is under surveillance, with the health of the child being dependent on the health of the mother. As such, the expectant woman and the

woman who is breast feeding is both watched and watches herself. Numerous sources of advice are offered to her, including books for the pregnant woman and the new mother, consultation with doctors, nurses, health visitors, government agencies, support groups. each one authorised by the discourse from which it emanates, but all place as primary the health of the child via the health of the mother. Again, who nurtures the nurturer?

'I read in a book...'; 'I was told that about a pint a day was right.' Baker has been given the authority to drink Guinness, because it is 'good' for the feeding mother. However, she breaks the rules laid down by this unnamed authority by drinking over the limit of what is prescribed as correct. In this act of 'excess' she places her own needs and desires before that of the child and thus resists the authorities who would seek to control her in the interests of another. She slips into the 'bad' (unfit) mother category.

[Play]

Now, I've had rather a good idea about this. What I'm going to do - I used to buy quarts but now you can only get litres.

[Pause Tape]

The 'used to' marks a historical space between the Baker of 'now' and the Baker of 'then' as well as foregrounding this as a staged re-presentation.

[Stage Description]

She kneels at one end of the sheet with a glass bottle of Guinness and rolls it down the sheet so the liquid spills out. She then rolls the other one at a ninety degree angle so that it collides with the first one, making a clinking noise.

[Play]

You see - I wanted that chink.

[Stage Description]

She removes the bottles from the sheet and returns them to the plastic bags.

> *Because that reminds me of the experience of taking the empties back to the off-licence in the pram. I used to save them all up, put them in, put the baby in the middle and bounce back to the off-licence. I once met the health visitor who looked a bit concerned but it didn't occur to me that there was any problem.*

[Pause Tape]

Here, Baker uses a noise to both mark a memory and to recall a memory. Again the figure of the woman under surveillance is raised and the image produced is one of a 'deviant' mother - the alcoholic mother. (Although, in fact, she may drink 'over' the prescribed limit she is not as 'deviant' as the health visitor assumes because she saves up the empty bottles, and it is their accumulation which infers the status 'alcoholic'.)

[Play]

> *Anyway, when I became a bit more relaxed I had the courage to go out in the car because that's quite difficult early on and I went to see my mother - it's only about 45 minutes away. She would give me a lovely lunch, probably some more fish pie, and always a nice pudding, because my mother likes puddings very much. She seems to like sticky fillings a lot. I don't like fillings very much myself. I never did. She used to always sort of make me eat them, which I thought was strange. We used to have things like junket, baked egg custard, stuffed rice pudding, but she has moved with the times, and she likes things like ice cream wafers or Vienetta, and she was very excited to discover this wonderful sheep's yoghurt, sheep's milk, but she didn't know it was sheep's milk. She said 'Greek yoghurt', but I did, but I didn't tell her.*

[Pause Tape]

Her mother is continuing to provide nurturance for her. Eating at her mother's house brings memories of childhood and food to the foreground, where her mother had the authority to enforce rules. However, this generational and hierarchical gap is somewhat overturned by Baker assuming authority over foodstuffs, poking fun at her mother's choice in deserts, and her lack of knowledge about 'Greek Yoghurt' which Baker does

not tell her is actually sheep's milk, implying that if her mother knew this, she would not like it.

[Play]

> *She had a very nice idea. She stewed some blackcurrants. I've always used tinned.*

[Pause Tape]

Again, the separation of mother/daughter is foregrounded, as well as the generational difference. The daughter opts for the non-time consuming ready-made fruit, while the mother continues in the older, more traditional (and somehow 'purer'?) act of preparing her own fruits.

[Play]

> *What she did was pop the yoghurt into a bowl. Incidentally, I find it very strange that although I don't like these puddings I always eat them when I'm there.*

[Pause Tape]

When in her mother's house, Baker once again becomes the 'child' and acts accordingly, doing what her mother would want her to do. Alternatively, she eats the puddings, in spite of the fact that she does not like them, because she does not want to offend her mother.

[Read]

> Although it may not be consciously articulated, the food expresses the affection and identity of the giver, and when it is rejected so too is the giver.[57]

[Stage Direction]

Baker is spooning yoghurt into a bowl, licking the remains off the spoon.

[Play]

> *The funny thing is, although I do have a sneaking suspicion why, but it's curious as well - I always eat more when I go to the kitchen when I clear up.*

[Pause Tape]

Why? Why? Mother Comfort?

[Play]

> *Now in here we'll spoon some blackcurrants. And I'm just going to show you how beautiful this is.*

[Stage Description]

Baker has spooned blackcurrants into the bowl of yoghurt and walks along the front row of the audience with it, holding it up so everyone can see.

> *It's one of those sort of amazing things one notices during an ordinary day to day life. It's lovely isn't it? The way the colours blend and the red chrome - creeps into the white.*

[Pause Tape]

Baker mixes up the 'ordinary' with the 'artistic', blending both as she blends the yoghurt and fruit, raising the ordinary to the artistic, and vice versa, thus blurring the boundaries between them. She transforms the everyday into art, both as an act of resistance to the mundanity of the 'everyday' and a questioning of the role and place of 'art'. It is an ironic take on 'ordinary' and 'art' within the one gesture.

[Play]

> *I don't really know about these technical terms, although I did go to art school, it sort of didn't quite stick. But I did think that a bit of something, you know, vivacious, would add to this picture.*

[Pause Tape]

While Baker may ironically be sending up the 'art world' she nevertheless authorises that send-up by referencing the fact that she has actually been trained as an artist. Her 'training' as a mother is authorised by the fact that she has children. However, her 'authority' to make art is invisible without her specifically citing her 'experience' as an artist.

[Stage Description]

Baker throws the contents of the bowl over the sheet.

[Play]

> *Now I don't know why but I have this sort of insatiable urge to walk on these and pop them.*

[Stage Description]

She walks all over the sheet, popping the blackcurrants with the soles of her shoes.

[Pause Tape]

This 'urge' is not that of the neat and ordered mother, but an urge that is primal, unexplainable - something out of the ordinary.

[Play]

> *Strange. I could go on doing this forever. Now I have discovered by becoming more experienced that at this point it's quite a good idea to take my shoes off otherwise I might fall over. And clear up as I go along.*

[Pause Tape]

Is she drawing off her experience as a mother or as an artist here, or has the division between the two completely collapsed by this point?

[Stage Description]

She goes to the edge of the sheet and takes off her shoes, and then puts the bowl and tubs away in the plastic bags.

[Play]

> *I became quite busy and well-adjusted.*

[Pause Tape]

What does `well-adjusted` mean - by whose standards? The fact that she 'became` indicates, once again, that one is not born a mother...

[Play]

> *We had quite a few money worries but I kept going and I found I enjoyed things like making chutney and what have you very much. I suppose it's quite obvious - it's a sort of creative outlet. I like chutney very much. And I like jelly, you know, jelly that you have with meat, and I used to make an awful lot of it, and give it away, to save money at Christmas.*

[Pause Tape]

The woman who is bound to her house and her children finds ways of turning the space/place into a creative field to meet her own needs. However, her resources are not only aimed at self-fulfilment but are designed as cost-cutting pursuits. Bobby Baker presents an image of a resourceful, 'homey' wife/mother.

[Play]

> *And I sometimes find it still in people's cupboards actually. This time, of course, I didn't make this. I have to admit, I bought it, and I washed the label off it and put this one on. But it gives the sort of right feel.*

[Pause Tape]

As an 'artist', Baker 'of course' no longer has time (read inclination?) to make her own chutney. Her 'outlet' has been found elsewhere. However, to present a picture of authenticity, she has replaced the manufactured labels with her own ones. If she does this in order to give us the 'right feel' I cannot help but wonder whether she has not merely stuck an authentic label or 'packaging' on herself in order to pass as the 'real' mother. The slightly/totally autobiographical reference trembles once more.

[Play]

> *I'll just share something with you. If you've never made chutney, the best bit for me, the smell is disgusting, is getting all the jars washed and clean and you put them in the oven to sterilise them and they look all hot and shiny and you get them out and you put all this hot chutney in and you label them up and wash them and they're just sort of sparkling, beautiful objects that you've made.*

[Fast forward. Play.]

> *Now, don't ask me why but I've got a very strong feeling that the way to draw with this, although I can't dance very well and I'm not trained or what have you, but I have a sort of desire to do something, a sort of pirouette. Well, it's not really, but this is my...*

[Pause Tape]

Like her previous 'urge', Baker now has an unexplainable 'desire' to 'draw' in a particular way, throwing her whole body into the process of production, like a dancer, and therefore embodying the artistic act.

Again, she raises the notion of being 'trained' to do something - in distinction to the 'mother' who just does it. However, troubling the 'desire' is the notion that there is something instinctive that leads us to act or do in a particular way - thus, 'mothering' may be an 'urge' or a 'desire' of a similar nature (and I use that word purposefully) - for which one does *not* need training. However, rather than reinscribing this notion of 'natural' impulses I would like to suggest, instead, that such 'impulses' are produced by material conditions, and are indications of frustration.

[Read]

> [RANK sits at the piano and plays. NORA dances more and more wildly. HELMER, taking up a position by the stove, gives her frequent directions as she dances. She seems not to hear them, her hair comes down and falls over her shoulders, but she goes on dancing without taking any notice. MRS LINDE comes in.]
> MRS LINDE [stopping spellbound in the doorway]: Ah!
> NORA [as she dances]: Oh, this is fun, Kristina!
> HELMER: But, Nora, darling, you're dancing as if your life depended on it!
> NORA: So it does.
> HELMER: Stop, Rank. This is sheer madness - stop, I tell you![58]

(Constrained by domesticity = desire to break free from the confines of that scene = 'madness'. Says who?)

Of course, this may just be an extension of her ironic parody of the 'action paintings'.

[Stage Description]

Holding a jar in each hand, Baker twirls round in repeated circles, splattering the contents as she does so.

[Fast Forward. Play]

> *Unfortunately, after this, because I was so busy - I suppose a bit loopy, I became very ill really. I had - women's troubles - something wrong, and it was terrible because I couldn't get better and everybody thought, except my husband and some friends, that I was having a sort of breakdown, but I was in terrible pain. Real pain.*

[Pause Tape]

The specifically female medical problems are left unstated, blanketed in the vague phrase 'women's trouble' - the insides are left securely secret(ed). However, these 'women's troubles' are similarly culturally elided by turning them into a 'breakdown', therefore removing any validity from them, so that 'women's troubles' becomes ghosted in this instance with the 'female hysteric' - another specifically 'woman's trouble'.

[Read]

> 'You see how hysterics shout,' he noted, 'much ado about nothing.' [59]
>
> ***
>
> The fact that women change their leading erotogenic zone [...] together with the wave of repression at puberty, which, as it were, puts aside their childish masculinity, are the chief determinants of the greater proneness of women to neurosis and especially to hysteria. These determinants, therefore, are intimately related to the essence of femininity.[60]
>
> ***

Baker insists that the pain was 'real' - not imaginary - but her own evidence and experience is dismissed. She has no authority to diagnose her own condition.

[Play]

> *And I ended up in bed for about five months which was terrible, with a small child to look after, and money worries. But the one thing about*

being ill, if you could call it nice, is that you sort of lie around the whole time and think, and I did think an awful lot.

[Stage Description]

Baker is now lying outstretched, on her back, on the sheet.

My mother used to come over and bring me these nice little sort of sponge fingers. Because they are very good when you're ill because you can digest them easily. And I didn't feel much like eating them and I'd eat them for her but they used to make the bed full of crumbs.

[Stage description]

Baker is taking the sponge fingers out of a bag and eating them, as well as crumbling them in her hand, so that the crumbs land on the sheet.

[Thought]

Baker uses food in various ways, each linked to a memory, either by sight, or sound, or colour, or smell (roast beef, Guinness bottles, yoghurt and berries, chutney). In this instance she extends the evocative nature of food to feel - the feel of crumbs in the bed to which one is confined.

[Play]

And my little daughter of two used to sit in bed with me and eat them, which makes it even more uncomfortable especially when you're in pain. A lot of pain. Then I discovered during this terrible time a way of beginning to feed myself, perhaps from the inside, which was quite a turning point.

[Stage description]

Baker gets up and her previously pristine white lab coat is now smeared with the imprints of the food she has just lain on.

[Pause Tape]

The memories that she has been drawing are now also marked onto her - the internal has become marked externally. The most visible mark is the mark of the blackberries - a deep red stain on the back of her overall, like the stain of bloody pain.

'I began to feed myself' - takes me back to the earlier episode of Baker literally not being able to feed herself, while the metaphorical use of the word 'feed' alludes more to a 'feeding of the soul'. This turning point may be the point at which Baker begins to realise her own needs, and to provide for those, rather than leaving them unmet.

[Play]

> *We'll move on quickly. I was very, very lucky. I was able, after all, to have another child, which is what I, we'd, desperately wanted and again I won't go into the details but I was in no way going near another hospital, so I had this one at home. And I became obsessed with cleanliness, especially the floor. I think it's some kind of instinct because my sister was the same.*

[Pause Tape]

From the imposed image of the 'hysteric' Baker shifts us to the image of the 'neurotic' mother-to-be, scrubbing and cleaning obsessively. Like the 'urge', and 'desire', this also is an 'instinct' - unexplainable. Her decision to have the child at home indicates her desire to escape from her dependency on the medical profession, which is regarded as being male dominated.

[Fast Forward. Play]

> *I did have all the things ready that one needs, including a flask of camomile tea which is very useful for drinking.*

[Fast Forward. Play.]

> *But actually I found hot, sweet ordinary tea more useful. It sort of stimulated me to keep me going.*

[Stage Direction.]

She picks up a flask. Drinks a little, and then pours it over the sheet.

> *It's not very interesting, is it?*

[Pause Tape]

Again, Baker wants to avoid talking about the actual process of giving birth, and turns instead to the practicalities of preparing for birth and of getting through labour, without actually telling us anything directly. The 'tea' - camomile first - a 'natural' herbal tea (one thinks here of the midwife and her 'secret potions' in opposition to 'male' medical establishment), known for its soothing, calming qualities, points to labour as being the opposite of that; the second tea - sweet and ordinary - is stimulating, and keeps Baker going - pointing to the ordeal that must be got through. The tea, therefore, signifies the process of labour in a way that is palatable and 'watered down' and this is mirrored by the mark it makes on the sheet which 'is not very interesting'.

[Play]

> *Now this is good. Because next, I'm afraid, I got post-natal depression so we had rather a rocky time as you can imagine. And I know that post-natal depression is really to do with suppressed anger and I was pretty angry by this stage.*

[Pause Tape]

This is the first mention that Baker explicitly makes of her emotional state, and 'by this stage' suggests that it has been an anger that has been building for some time - as indicated by the eruptions that keep appearing throughout the performance text. 'This is good' acknowledges our voyeuristic desires. We desire to see the 'bad' times.

[Play]

> *I did get better quite soon but again it was heavy*

[Pause Tape]

Like giving birth, breast-feeding, and 'women's troubles', Baker glides over post-natal depression fleetingly, putting us at ease that she is not going to dwell on her depression too long.

[Play]

but what I thought would be good for this - I love this bit, I think you will, although it's meant to be sad, is putting some of this on.

[Pause Tape]

This moment is, for Baker and for the audience, one of catharsis.

[Stage Direction]

She pours black treacle out of a jar, making spirals onto the sheet.

[Play]

I had a tutor at college who always used to say 'Put a bit of black on it,' whenever I was at a difficult part in a painting, which seemed extremely unhelpful. I had thought this morning that he would be very proud to see me now, doing this wonderful drawing.

[Pause Tape]

While mockingly referring to her art tutor, Baker is simultaneously acknowledging that this part of the picture is 'difficult' and the black of the treacle is symbolic of the darkness of depression, the 'black mood'.

[Play]

Anyway, I did get better and I became a fairly well-adjusted, busy, working - paid working - mother.

[Pause Tape]

Again, well-adjusted indicates that mothering is not something one automatically does, but something one has to adjust to. By citing her status as a paid working mother Baker draws attention to the fact that while all mothers are working by the very act of their being mothers, not all are paid - because being paid is something that happens outside of the domestic sphere, and mothering is unpaid labour.

[Play]

Because quite frankly I had to go back to paid work because we were in big financial trouble. So I just became, until this stage, more and more skilled, quicker, sharper. I'll demonstrate this as best I can with one of my dinner party recipes.

[Fast Forward. Play.]

> *What I'm doing is, I must sorry, speed up. I am always thinking about fifty different things at once because this is usually eight o'clock and they're coming at half past eight. We've sort of stopped doing this now but we did for a while have dinner parties and friends would be coming and Andrew would be upstairs with the children and I'd say 'Hurry up guys. Get into bed. Andrew!!' And he would take no notice so I would be thinking 'Got to lay the table, put my make-up on. Got to finish that. Do this'.*

[Pause Tape]

Self-explanatory.

[Stage Description]

She has separated the eggs and is now whisking the yolks.

[Play]

> *It's just so wonderful. It's smooth, and pale yellow, and paler the more you do.*

[Pause Tape]

Like the blackcurrants and yoghurt, Baker is drawing out the aesthetic qualities of the mundane.

[Stage Description.]

She mixes the egg whites in a food mixer.

[Fast forward. Play]

> *Mesmerising. You can think about anything you want. You might remember something else.*

[Pause Tape]

Undertaking the task of something boring and repetitive allows the mother time for her own reflections. Baker alludes to the fact that it is only at moments like this that she is able to have time to think for herself.

[Fast forward. Play]

> *I find something else I've learned since I've become an earning mother, money earning mother, is that it's a good idea to be well-turned out, it's good for you, you feel you look nice. I couldn't somehow achieve it before but I've since become quite good at it and I've got some nice clothes*

[Pause Tape]

Having money enables the mother to spend some of it on herself and her appearance. Baker here raises a class issue. If you feel you look good, you feel good. With no money to do that, the corollary is that if you feel you look bad, you will therefore feel bad.

[Play]

> *but it's also a good idea not to become too good, because it's not a good idea for children to have perfect parents, so I've read. You should be a good enough mother.*

[Pause Tape]

The authority figure on parenting is once again inserted into Baker's text, drawing a somewhat ridiculous line between a 'good' parent and a 'too good' parent, as the latter will result in being a 'bad' parent.

[Play]

> *What I do with my pudding in the bowl is to fold this together with a spatula. Which is the only thing I forgot to bring with me, I'm afraid. So I'll just have to use my hand but one can draw with your hand so what I'll do is just pop this across here.*

[Stage Description]

She throws the contents of the bowl across the sheet.

> *And this one - try and get them to blend.*

[Stage Description]

She throws the contents of the other bowl across the sheet.

And then I'll quite sort of gently fold them together.

[Stage Description]

Baker uses her hands to fold the two mixtures into one another.

[Pause Tape]

As Baker is blending the white and the yolk together she is symbolically blending together her roles as a mother and an artist, so that the two become indistinct, and merge into the one. This is a metaphorical action of the entire drawing, which equally blends together the mother/artist transforming it into mother-artist, with neither term taking ascendancy.

[Play]

So soft. One wouldn't know that if one did it with a spatula.

[Pause Tape]

The food takes on a tactility that transcends its status as food stuff.

[Play]

Now, I suppose you could say that my drawing is completely up to date but there is one more thing which I find it very difficult to talk about but it is important and that's an element of my life, of life, that is sort of like a, sort of peaceful and happy, and it's sort of symbolized by white light.

[Stage Description]

Baker takes a sieve and sifts white flour over the entire picture.

I'm using strong white flour and I'm not being racist, it's just so beautiful, don't you think? Well, I think so. You know, I'm afraid I'm going to take these away.

[Stage Description]

She removes the frozen fish pies.

[Pause Tape]

The artist has the authority to change her work in any way she pleases. for aesthetic purposes.

[Play]

> *Carry on like this. I got another little bag because I thought that wouldn't do. Self-raising. Sorry, I couldn't help that.*

[Fast forward]

> *It's a good thing, the supermarket. Sorry. I'm changing the subject. My sister who is clever uses logarithms to work out the difference between prices.*

[Pause Tape]

Baker is not alone in turning the mundanities of daily life into more interesting enterprises.

[Stage Description]

Baker stops sieving. The sheet is now covered in a layer of flour.

[Rewind. Play]

> *there is one more thing which I find it very difficult to talk about but it is important and that's an element of my life, of life, that is sort of like a, sort of peaceful and happy, and it's sort of symbolised by white light.*

[Pause Tape]

Baker refuses to reveal this part of her life because she herself finds it difficult, not because she is saving us from embarrassment. Although she has revealed aspects of her personal experiences she keeps this to herself. There is an implicit acknowledgement again of our voyeuristic pleasures. By keeping this memory secret(ed) she is protecting it from the outside. We are left to wonder what it could be. Moreover, this experience is not confined to one part of the picture, but falls all over it, blotting out and blotting up the food that lies below, covering everything in a 'white light', thus covering over all the other experiences.

[Fast Forward. Play.]

[Stage Description]

Baker stops sieving.

I think it is important to take your past with you, into your future. Well, it's inescapable really, quite hard not to. But to consciously do that and so I thought I'd take this with me, or should demonstrate it. Obviously I'm not going to take it with me all the way. This is quite a difficult bit.

[Stage Description]

Baker lies down on one edge of the sheet and begins to roll herself up in it.

What I'm going to do is roll myself up in it so it's really close to me, like a cracker, a giant cracker.

[Stage Description]

Once she has rolled herself up, she removes one arm from under the sheet and pushes herself up into a standing position.

so, just to finish this off I thought I'd sort of celebrate the whole thing by dancing. I chose the music I like.

[Stage Description]

A Nina Simone recording comes on - 'My Baby Just Cares For Me' - and, still cocooned in the sheet, Baker starts to dance.

[Pause Tape]

Baker, choosing the music she wants has, at the end of the performance, placed herself and her own desires first. The memories etched out onto the sheet are now etched around Baker's body, as if the internal thoughts have been literally exteriorised and she is wearing them on the outside of her skin. In fact, the memories that she has inscribed have now been inscribed onto her own body, like a giant body tattoo, each mark bearing a testimony to Baker's life as a mother. Such marks of experience are usually invisible.

but Baker has consciously revealed them to us, and in this act, has revealed her personal experiences of mothering. The ways in which 'mothers' are marked is literalised.

[Read]

> Gradually, this seepage takes on the appearance of internal organs - a mapping of capillaries and veins, a tacit revelation of *interior* matters.[61]

The Baker that stands before us is very different from the Baker who first entered the performance space - clean, neat, tidy. This Baker wears her life on her sleeve, so to speak, and it is not a mapping of order, but of the chaos of life. Random, messy, disordered. The sheet wrapped around her also traps her into the body of the mother; in a sense, she is 'mummified'.

[Play. Stage Description]

Baker squashes the clear plastic floor covering into one of the carrier bags. The song fades out and Baker picks up the bags and exits.

[Pause Tape]

The stage is now completely bare. Baker has removed all traces of her presence. As promised, she tidied up everything as she went along. When she first entered the space, it was empty; then she filled it with food inspired memories of her experiences. Baker brought everything she needed into the space, indeed created the 'space', as the mother is supposed to create the 'home'. When she exits, she takes that space with her, reinforcing the invisibility of motherhood. The mess is packed away, and order is reinscribed. The presence of the mother has once again been erased. Except that it remains in our memories. To be recalled. Remembered. Rewritten.

SOJOURNING THROUGH MEMORY

[I]dentity is always in part a narrative, always in part a kind of representation. It is always within representation. Identity is not something which is formed outside and then we tell stories about it. It is that which is narrated in one's own self.

Stuart Hall[62]

My name's [....]

It's about my experiences [....]

[...] *this is slightly autobiographical.* [...]

Totally autobiographical, and I mean that [....]

Identity. Experience. Autobiography. Does Bobby Baker merely represent her experiences?

Teresa de Lauretis writes of experience:

> I use the term not in the individualistic, idiosyncratic sense of something belonging to one and exclusively her own even though others might have 'similar' experiences; but rather in the general sense of a *process* by which for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, originating in oneself) those relations - material, economic, and interpersonal - which are in fact social, and, in a larger perspective, historical.[63]

While this performance is supposedly 'drawn' from experience, could it be said that Bobby Baker is in fact resisting the notion of experience 'originating in oneself' by actually locating experience within social and historical relations, showing in the process how such relations in fact constitute experience, and in turn construct subjectivity - in this case, the subjectivity of Baker, the mother?

To pursue this line of thought, I wish firstly to take Baker's 'confession of confession' and place it alongside a brief tracing of 'literary' autobiographical practices

to see whether theories of literary criticism can usefully be applied to the practice of 'autobiographical' performance art. In spite of the fact that so much of women's performance art would seem to rely on the 'confession', the 'autobiography', the 'testimony', the 'self-narrative' (and once again the boundaries are, of course, dissolving), there appears to be very little critical analysis that deals specifically with the problems or potentials of utilising 'autobiography' within this practice. Where the autobiographical content is referenced, it is usually so done to mark the importance of the previously 'silenced' finding a voice, and speaking out.[64]

Printed autobiographical writings are necessarily different to 'performed' autobiographies. The very 'act' of *performing* would seem to remove the autobiography from any approximation to the 'real'. Additionally, as previously demonstrated, the much celebrated ability of performance art to show the 'real self', in contrast to the 'acting/performing' self, has itself been theoretically problematised, since there is no 'real' that can be absolutely 'known'. Paradoxically, however, the fact that there is a live, present performer, 'really there' might, in some way, support the autobiographical content of the performed piece. Unlike the subject of written autobiographies, the live performer can be seen, and such visibility will either reinforce or weaken the 'truth' value of the autobiographical act. Is the performer what she says she is? Do we believe her performance? The live and the printed can perhaps, then, be said to converge around notions of 'Truth' and the attendant 'real', or resistances to such notions.

Traditionally, the practice of autobiographical writing was linked to notions of metaphysical selfhood. At the centre of the autobiography was a subject who supposedly knew himself.[65] As Sidonie Smith notes, the individual who had emerged at the beginning of the Renaissance was by the mid-nineteenth century 'conceptualized as a "fixed, extralinguistic" entity consciously pursuing its unique destiny'.[66]

Furthermore, this individual self was conceived as a rational being with the body subordinated to consciousness and thought whereby 'the self thereby presumes the possibility of self-knowledge', and 'assumes its privileged status as the origin of meaning, knowledge, truth'.[67] Historically, the subject of autobiography displays agency over his life, ordering it into a teleological progression, where everything is given rational meaning and this 'teleological drift of selfhood concedes nothing to indeterminacy, to ambiguity, or to heterogeneity. Such purposiveness leads to the silencing of that which is contingent, chaotic, tangential to a true self.'[68]

However, the concept of the 'universal subject' demanded that anyone outwith the notion of the 'universal' - that is, the inappropriate - was excluded from the autobiographical act:

> To secure the universality of the self, cultural practices set various limits, and those limits are normative limits of race, gender, sexuality, and class identifications.[69]

Once again, we see that any notion of the 'universal subject' requires that other subjects are made to be inappropriate, so that the 'universal subject' can shore up its 'universality'. Those bodies rendered as Other transmute into others perceived as essentially body, while the universal subject is not 'body' but consciousness or soul. Since, as Smith notes, women are fully in their body, *embodied* as procreators and nurturers, the female subject can never be the disembodied universal subject, but must necessarily inhabit the margins. In the words of Judith Butler, 'From this belief that the body is Other, it is not a far leap to the conclusion that others *are* their bodies, while the masculine 'I' is the noncorporeal soul.'[70] Paradoxically, while the white, heterosexual, masculine 'I' is the universal subject, he also perceives himself as an individual, since his

body is made invisible, and therefore does not carry the cultural inscriptions of the marginalised. As Susan Stanford Friedman asserts:

> Isolate individualism is illusion. It is also the privilege of power. A white man has the luxury of forgetting his skin color and sex. He can think of himself as an 'individual.' Women and minorities, reminded at every turn in the great cultural hall of mirrors of their sex or color, have no such luxury.[71]

In her role as procreator and nurturer, what woman sees in the mirror are the associated roles of wife, mother, daughter (and note here that these are exactly the positions that Baker occupies in her performance, a point I will address later). As such, 'woman's destiny cannot be self-determined, and her agency cannot be exercised' as her roles are already fully mapped out for her.[72] (Of course, to a lesser extent, males are also constrained by the roles that are already mapped out for them. However, I would argue that white, heterosexual, middle-class men have greater access to the machinations of power which would enable them to contest these roles in an attempt to change them. Additionally, the roles into which males are positioned are, generally speaking, beneficial to most men. Of course, some do not wish to, or in fact cannot, fit into them and in these cases such roles are perceived to be as prescriptive as those available to women.)

The pertinent question, in respect of the above, is how can women - wholly associated with the body - write herself in(to) autobiography, since autobiography (knowledge of self-hood) is associated with the rational mind?[73] Of course, autobiographical writing has become increasingly varied and diverse, with more 'marginalised' voices being represented - including famous and unknown gay men, lesbians, black people and women. However, I would also suggest that in spite of such a proliferation of voices, there remains within autobiography a pressure towards unification of the subject.

The very question of 'how' one writes oneself into autobiography has itself been superseded in recent years by questions pertaining to the very notion of writing the autobiographical self in the first instance. Can there be such a thing as writing the 'self'? That is, can the self 'know' itself? As has been explored in Chapter 3, such conceptions of 'self-hood' have come under attack from numerous (and often competing, yet overlapping) quarters. What is at stake in such questioning is the replacement of the concept of 'identity' with that of 'subjectivity.' One does not have an 'identity' that can be rationally observed and depicted. Rather, one is a subject whose very subjectivity is the continuing result of discourses existing around, and producing, every person. Thus, subjectivity is not fixed, stable, or unified, but is itself subject to shifts, splits, and multivalent positionings.

Moreover, while the autobiographical writer may wish to dispense with his material body and its attendant needs, desires and emotions, the unconscious continuously intrudes upon, and therefore affects, his so-called rational thought. As a result, there can be no pure state of 'rationality' for within it is the unconscious, which is necessarily irrational.

Adding to Freud's unsettling of the 'knowing subject' is Lacan's rendering of the 'mirror stage' in which the subject misrecognises itself as stable and unified, when in fact it feels the opposite of this. The subject is necessarily split, both 'is' and 'is not' the reflected image. Shari Benstock, reading Lacan's conception of the mirror stage against autobiographical critic Georges Gusdorf's work, concludes that Gusdorf's definition of the autobiographical act repeats the effects of the mirror stage:

> 'Autobiography... requires a man to take a distance with regard to himself in order to reconstitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time.' The effect of such a distancing and reconstituting is precisely the effect of the mirror stage: a recognition of the alienating forces within the specular (the

> 'regard') that leads to the desperate shoring-up of the reflected image against disintegration and division.[74]

While the autobiographical subject assumes it is coherent and unified, such an assumption belies the fact that every subject is in fact a split subject, and cannot therefore ever know itself in entirety.

Finally, poststructuralist theory suggests that every subject is plagued by the movement of *différance*, in which its very subjecthood is dependent on what it is not, but that 'not' is necessarily part of the 'is', and the two cannot be neatly demarcated. Both presence and absence exist simultaneously within every subject, even though the absent is denied or repressed. Furthermore, as the chain of signifiers can never finally be pinned down neither can the 'I' of autobiography. 'I' can never be sure of 'me'. Moreover, 'I' can never be sure of your conception of 'me'. The 'I' is both the subject and object of autobiography, and liable, therefore, to slippage between the two renderings. The 'I' will exceed the signifier, signifying in unexpected and unintended ways.

Such troubling of the 'I' of autobiography prompts Betty Bergland to ask whether

> we read at the center of the autobiography a self, an essential individual, imagined to be coherent and unified, the originator of her own meaning, or do we read a postmodern subject - a dynamic subject that changes over time, is situated historically in the world and positioned in multiple discourses?[75]

From a poststructuralist perspective, the subject is necessarily 'multiply designated', situated within competing discourses, and is also therefore non-unified, non-consistent, and fluid. There is not one homogeneous body, but a body that bears the multiple marks of historical positioning, including sex, gender, sexuality, race and class. 'Experience', then, is multifaceted rather than unified and singular.

Craig R Barclay asserts, in relation to autobiographical writing, that the reader must be convinced that the 'telling' of events resembles closely the way they actually happened, or 'the autobiography as a genre would fall into the category of fiction'.[76] This assertion raises a number of important points that I wish to address. First, in this proposition, the success of the autobiography rests on whether what the author 'tells' is convincing to the reader, suggesting that 'truth' is dependent on two parties. Thus, as Leigh Gilmore notes, 'the canonizing of "What is truth?" cannot be separated from the process of verifying that truth.'[77] Suggesting that authority in autobiography is related to the truth claim of confession, Gilmore suggests that 'in order to stand as an authoritative producer of "truth," one must successfully position oneself as a confessing subject whose account adequately fulfils enough of the requirements of the confession'. Furthermore, autobiography

> cannot [...] be seen to draw its social authority simply from a privileged relation to real life. Rather, authority is derived through autobiography's proximity to the rhetoric of truth telling: the confession.[78]

Thus, as Foucault has written, the production of truth is dependent on the relationship between teller and listener, without which there would be no 'truth'. It is this *relationship* which authorises the autobiography, categorising it as truthful or not, rather than simply the content.

However, any notion of 'telling the truth' about one's life is problematised in the same way that the concept of a stable, coherent, and unified identity is destabilised. The blurring of 'truth' and 'non-truth' necessarily also blurs the literary genre of autobiography. Therefore, Rubin's assertion that if the reader is not 'convinced', then the autobiography would 'fall into the category of fiction', is also troubled. On the basis of a postructuralist notion of the 'truth of identity', autobiography is always already

fictional. As Smith notes, in relation to Derrida and Lacan, both perceive (albeit differently) that:

> the 'self' is a fiction, an illusion constituted in discourse, a hypothetical place or space of storytelling. The true self, or core of metaphysical selfhood, can never be discovered, unmasked, revealed because there is nothing at the core. The self has no origin, no history, since both origin and history are, like the self, fictions.[79]

However, such an understanding of subjectivity does not mean that the autobiographical subject does not 'draw' from experience. Such a drawing, however, is dependent on memory, and as such, these 'drawings' are necessarily partial, selective, subjective:

> 'I told you the Truth,' I say yet again. 'Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies.'[80]

The past cannot be recaptured in the present and represented identically to its happening. The past is always (re)interpreted through the lens of the present and as the present moment is always changing (and becoming the past) such reinterpretations are continuous.[81] Thus, if the self is constituted from past events, this self is itself subject to an interpretative process, and such interpretation is plagued by gaps, omissions, and the unconscious. 'The invocation of the remembered implies the silences of the unremembered.'[82]

In traditional autobiographical writing, where the 'I' of autobiography is presumed to be stable and unified, where the 'I' has agency over events and the meanings given to such events, memories are arranged in a linear narrativity which point towards or back to the 'I' at the centre of the writing in possession of a single, stable referent. According to Smith, the pursuit of selfhood develops in two directions, one horizontal and one vertical. The 'horizontal autobiography' involves a movement through stages of growth, but such movement is always grounded in a prior unified core.

In the vertical autobiography, by contrast, it is the central core that is being searched for, the self that is to be discovered lying at the bottom of all the events. The horizontal autobiography, then, expands the already present core, while the vertical autobiography reveals the core. Both directions lead 'to certain teleological itineraries - the unfolding of the mind toward greater knowledge, or the unfolding of personal history toward some progressive goal'.[83]

Kim Worthington, in an attempt to reconcile poststructuralism with agency, suggests that 'in thinking myself, I remember myself: I draw together my multiple members - past and other subject positions - into a coherent narrative of selfhood which is more or less readable by myself and others'.[84] While this assertion notes that there are multiple subject positions held by the writing subject, these multiples are still ordered into a singularity - the 'coherent narrative of selfhood', where narrative, for Worthington, 'denote[s] the constitutive process by which human beings order their conceptions of self and of the world around them.'[85] Worthington's central concern is that the constituted self can still form communities with others, because these selves are recognisable, even if such recognition simultaneously contains the recognition that the 'self' is a construction. Such a narrative of the self enables the subject to 'project [...] desire and intention towards an imagined future'.[86] The danger, however, implicit in Worthington's theoretical stance is that power is always already implicated in suggestions of the 'readable subject' - who authorises the readable from the unreadable, even within so-called communities (of like)?[87] Differences may again be elided or suppressed, and where they are not, the bearers of 'difference' may be excluded.

All of this should indicate the danger of taking the 'autobiography', with its attendant 'truth produced by memory', at face value. Can we ever really know the 'truth' or remember faithfully? Or, more radically, can there ever even be a 'truth' or a

faithful memory in the first place? With its invocation to 'truth', autobiography is a powerful tool in the authorising of 'correct' subject positions, perpetuating the maintenance of such 'proper' and 'improper' subjects. However, the corollary of this is that the autobiography also allows the 'unofficial' voice to make an entrance. Whether it can be heard (read), however, is another matter.

In contemporary autobiographical writing, a frequent strategy employed to question the truth value of the autobiography is to question the autobiographical form within the very autobiography. Autobiographical metafictions make explicit the blurring of genres between autobiography (truth) and fiction, and therefore the actual blurring of truth and fiction. The quote from Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, cited earlier, is a pertinent example since this novel is, literally, a 'fictional autobiography'.[88]

Another tactic for troubling the truth claims of autobiography is to call into question the truth of the memories recounted. A perfect example of this is to be found in a citation included in Worthington's article:

> In Philip Roth's *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (1988), the autobiography is prefaced by a letter from Roth to one of his own fictional characters, [...] as follows: 'Memories of the past are not memories of facts but memories of your imaginings of the facts.... It isn't that you subordinate your ideas to the force of the facts in autobiography but that you construct a sequence of stories to bind up the facts with a persuasive *hypothesis* that unravels your history's meaning.'[89]
>
> In yet another example, citing Virginia Woolf, Smith writes that Woolf avoids assuming the position of the subject who knows by stepping into others' stories located in history, thus 'refusing to contain her narrative in a coherent chronology'.[90] Such strategies point to subjectivity as being 'constituted provisionally through the contextualities of history, family, and individual experience'.[91]

Cherie Moraga, meanwhile, refuses to deal with specific bodily experiences of oppression by making explicit the multiplicity of meanings that are inscribed all over her body, including those connected to sexuality, race, and sex, which are presented as 'part and parcel of a complex web of personal and political identity and oppression'.[92] And yet, as Smith notes, Moraga resists universalising her experiences by keeping her subject status as a Chicana lesbian to the foreground of her writing, thus insisting 'on the material specificity of the body that speaks and on the specific discourses, practices, and contexts that inscribe the cultural meaning of that body'.[93]

I have included these examples offered by Sidonie Smith merely to highlight the potential that autobiographical practices may hold for those who wish to transgress/subvert the form by troubling notions of the stable subject - particularly the subject 'woman'. I wish now to return to Bobby Baker's performance and analyse the ways in which she utilises 'autobiography' and 'confession' to produce such troubling of the subject 'known' as Bobby Baker.

The first words spoken -

My name's Bobby Baker.

It would seem that the subject has been posited, located firmly on the ground directly before us.

But before speech, vision.

[Stage Description.]

Bobby Baker enters the performance space wearing a white lab-type coat (just-below-knee length), and low wedged heel shoes. She has neatly bobbed fair hair and looks to be aged mid/late '30s. She is carrying two full plastic carrier bags. The foregrounded

picture is that of the 'good housekeeper.' The image before us is that of a re-presentation of a familiarly circulated and recognisable symbol.

My name's Bobby Baker.

Interestingly, this 'subject' who speaks does not say *I am Bobby Baker*, but announces herself with the *name* Bobby Baker - the subject is perhaps named, therefore, but not strictly posited or given. And the name refers back to the re-presented symbol - the stereotype of housewife/mother - not to someone that exists outside of that re-presentation. In this respect, Bobby Baker would seem to be more of a recognisable 'character' than a knowing subject. But then Bobby Baker tells us that she is going to be drawing a picture from her experiences. And that this performance is *slightly autobiographical. Totally autobiographical.* Irrespective of the troubling space interjected between *slightly* and *totally*, there is a deeper troubling already existent between the 'character' Bobby Baker, and the 'subject' that is relating her experiences. Do the experiences belong to Bobby Baker, the character, or the 'real' Bobby Baker? Is this performance autobiographical, or is it an autobiographical metafiction? The success of the performance lies in the fact that these questions cannot be answered. We never know whether we are seeing the real 'subject' or the truth of her experiences, or whether and to what extent the performance is fictional, because notions of both the 'truth' and the 'real' are problematised. Throughout the entire piece there is a blurring and slipping between truth and fiction, prompting a questioning of these absolutes.

Such a questioning, I would suggest, throws a spoke into the confessional nature of this performance and in the process, reveals something of the spectator's (my) desire. I desperately want, need, this performance to be 'real'. I want to share this moment of

intimacy with Bobby Baker, and fulfil my role as confidante, absolver, shoulder of support. This giving of myself demands her giving herself. There is a mutual contract between us. What if, after the performance, I discovered that Bobby Baker had never, in fact, had any children? How would I feel? Cheated? Exploited? Manipulated? Does this troubling of the 'truth/fiction' binary unlock an uneasiness in me, enacting a simultaneous troubling of the contract between spectator/performer based on 'trust'? While I may not know what is 'really true' I still find myself wanting to insist on the 'truth' value of these experiences. That these experiences belong to her. That her 'presence' before me is 'real'.[94]

What is most obvious in the 'character' of Bobby Baker - and in fact what signals the fact that she may be a character - is the use of parody in the explicit mimicking of the 'good housewife/mother'. Even before the performance we are confronted with the name - Bobby Baker - an alliterative and illustrative name, conjuring up the figure of a cartoon character. Baker - a person who makes food. Bobby Baker - a person who makes art with food. Indeed, not just some person, but a woman - a position thrown into confusion by the first name which is commonly assumed to be male.

Prior to beginning the actual drawing, Bobby Baker is hyper-clean and controlled, organised and calm. She talks to us in a soft, endearing, almost apologetic tone, asking us to 'pardon her' if she cannot quite live up to the standards we expect. (Such pleas bear the echoes of the 'confession' as noted previously, where we are situated to judge whether the confession meets the required expectations.) Throughout the piece, Baker solicits our sympathies as if to protect herself: 'I'm a bit rusty so if you'll bear with me.' 'I'll try and keep you occupied.' 'I'm going to try and keep in tune...' 'I'm afraid you'll just have to bear with me.' 'I hope you don't find this too boring.'

In addition to playing the passive woman appealing to the good nature of the (forgiving) spectator, Baker also speaks in a soft, soothing voice, ensuring that the spectator feels included and informed. This aspect of the 'character' seems to connote two different personas (both juxtaposed to the passive role which is played simultaneously) - that of a teacher speaking to her pupils, and that of the cookery demonstrator speaking to her audience. In either case, there is an acknowledgement that Baker is the one with the 'expertise' who is going to share that expertise with others, in a careful and caring way. 'I hope you can all see.' 'Now what I`m going to do...`, `On top of this I lay.' It is with such statements that she leads us gently through her performance. However, since the tone of voice that she uses is recognisably similar to that used by teachers/television presenters, the parody of her performance is foregrounded as the spectator is immediately able to identify these stereotypical figures that are in social circulation. This parodic display of the good housekeeper/wife is most blatantly and humorously inscribed in the repetitive manner in which Baker cleans up after her every action, and references that fact as she does so, so that it becomes a sort of leitmotif of the entire performance. 'This is to avoid mess. Extra mess. Because one discovers [...] that if you think ahead, you can save yourself work.' 'Don't worry. I've got a jay cloth. Damp.' `Pop it back in the box. I`m going to clear up as I go along. Something I've learnt.' 'Better put the top back on.' 'Clear up as I go along.` 'So let's just clear this up.'

In a similar vein, there is the repetitive trope of the resourceful housewife, caring about the environment, avoiding unnecessary waste, and saving money. Again, due to the familiarity of this `eco-housewife' symbol, this is foregrounded as being entirely parodic through carrying such resourcefulness to the extreme. 'This is the good thing about drawing on a sheet because you can wash it afterwards.` 'You needn't worry, this

[roast beef] won't be wasted, I shall find a good home for it.' 'It's very important to save egg shells because they make good compost.'

A final strategy that suggests the constructed nature of 'Bobby Baker' is once more a recognisable British 'gesture' - that of avoiding embarrassing subjects, such as giving birth, 'women's problems', and 'breast feeding'. This embarrassment connotes the very 'proper' woman who would not wish to discuss such 'unsuitable' subjects. However, the embarrassment is actually displaced onto the spectator - 'Now, I don't want to embarrass you too much with sort of nasty details about childbirth', 'I won't embarrass you anymore about that', 'I had - women's trouble -', 'We'll move on quickly', 'Again, I won't go into the details'.

Such parodic strategies seem to produce a gap between Baker the performer and Baker the subject of the performance, so that I never know who the 'real' Bobby Baker is. However, foregrounding the *constructed* nature of the character Bobby Baker, also alerts us to the possibility of the socially constructed 'nature' of the 'real' Bobby Baker, perhaps prompting the question 'What, then, *is* 'real' about the 'real' person behind the persona?'

Despite this parodic representation of the 'mother/housewife' there is, however, an implicit danger in representing a female subject as being passive, domestic, modest, nurturing, and caring. However, I would suggest that Baker at least attempts to avoid such a reinscription of the female body by playing these marks to excess, through mimicking a recognisable cultural 'fiction'. Using such devices as excessive rendering and repetition they cannot be taken to be the 'real' of anything and in fact such tactics aim to de-naturalise the very concept of the natural 'mother' or 'housewife', making 'visible the concealed mechanisms which work to make them transparent, and brings to the fore their politics'.[95] Additionally, such over-inscription points to the more invisible -

and therefore pervasive - markings of the female body that lie below the surface of this parody. Lying beneath the Baker who almost obsessively cleans up as she goes along is the mother whose work is invisible; beside the woman who amusingly relates the story of taking empties back to the off-licence is the observing eye of the medical establishment and the pressure for all women to put their children first; and contained within the resourceful mother who makes chutney is the woman pushing at the boundaries of her constraint by turning domestic acts into resistant acts of creativity.

Such acts of resistance are literalised within the performance, and in effect the culturally inscribed image of the 'housewife/mother' is undermined as the performer 'Bobby Baker' clashes with the prescribed image 'Bobby Baker', who is tidy, neat, clean, calm, organised, resourceful and self-effacing. Baker, the performer, uses food in a way that is removed from domesticity - throwing it around, creating a mess, rolling herself up in it. Through such acts, food is placed outwith its prescribed cultural contexts while Baker herself simultaneously challenges those same contexts which seek to tie her to that domesticity. While this could be acceptable in the name of 'art', it still troubles the binary woman/artist and causes the supposedly fixed ground of 'mother' to tremble.

Equally, while some of the food is used in an 'orderly' way (and the external mess is cleared up), there are also moments in the text when 'disorder' is introduced, through the suggestion of 'needs', 'instincts' and 'desires'. Lurking beneath such control one senses the pent-up frustrations awaiting release, occasionally witnessing such release in actions that remain unexplained. As Lucy Baldwyn asserts:

> Apparently acquiescing to the repressive stereotypes proliferated within misogynistic culture - by identifying herself as a mother/housewife and discussing shopping and cooking - [Baker] simultaneously undermines them by contravening their limits. Employing a particularly British gamut of emotions - reticence, irony, and embarrassment - she concocts theatrical images that resonate with unspoken desires and frustrations.[96]

Likewise, the precisely neat image of the 'mother/housewife' slips as Baker's material body begins to show signs of its materiality - the sweating, the stains on her previously 'Persil-white' overall - alongside the textual references to memories of her body being pregnant, birthing, breastfeeding, and 'women's problems'. Her failure to live up to the stereotypical image of the 'good mother/housewife' is also revealed in her admittance of drinking over the prescribed limit and of suffering from post-natal depression. The material body of Bobby Baker, the performer, seeps through the parodic body of the housewife/mother, with such seepage hinting at the falsity of the seamless and unified body. The material body continuously threatens to disrupt the imaged body, and Baker actively draws our attention to this materiality by referencing the literal fluids of the body.[97]

By interjecting her physical body into her performance, Baker contests the autobiographical practice that would separate body from mind, the rational from the irrational, and allows that body to erupt into, and become part of, the narrative of *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*. Indeed, it is from her body - both its enactments in the performance and memories remembered from bodily experiences - that the 'narrative' is drawn (extracted and displayed). As Sidonie Smith asserts:

> Writing her experiential history of the body, the autobiographical subject engages in a process of critical self-consciousness through which she comes to an awareness of the relationship of her specific body to the cultural 'body' and to the body politic.[98]

The body of Bobby Baker - both the parodic Bobby Baker and the performer Bobby Baker - is a body which is, to return to Sidonie Smith, 'multiply designated'. There is not one Bobby Baker who knows 'herself', but a subject who is dispersed across numerous and often competing discourses, each of which contributes to the experiences

that Baker reveals. Bobby Baker is simultaneously woman, wife, mother, daughter, artist, performer, and throughout the performance the clashing of these subject positions is made explicit. As a mother she cannot be an artist, as an artist she cannot be a good mother, as a good mother she must place her children first, as an individual subject she has a right to satisfy her own needs, as a wife and mother her needs are secondary, as a daughter she must be a child, as a mother she must be an adult, as an artist she must be an individual, as a woman she cannot be an individual, etc. etc. The representation of the subject who is multiply designated serves to undermine the notion that the subject speaks from one, stable position and therefore exercises control over self-identity.

In her invocation to 'experience', Baker resists providing the spectator with an understanding of these experiences that feeds into any notion of a stable subject presented before us. Instead, I would suggest that she represents the experiences and the various discourses that impacted or caused such experiences, and therefore the discourses that have shaped her subjectivity. It is not, therefore, that Bobby Baker reveals her experiences to stabilise her self-identity, but that the representation of such experiences indicates the multiple ways in which her subjectivity has been discursively constructed. The experience of motherhood, then, Baker's 'experience' of motherhood, does not so much 'show' Baker (the mother) as reveal the discursive practices or forces that enable the production of such experiences, constructing the figure of the 'mother' in the process. The questions which surface as a result are *why* these experiences should be experienced in this way, and what alternative experiences and subject positions might be imaginable?

It is not only the 'I' of this piece that is destabilised but the mapping of history. Baker's chronology of her experiences, beginning with her first pregnancy and ending with the wrapping of her experiences around her body to carry them into her future.

suggests initially a teleological narrative, which progresses from a 'beginning' which is her past (pre-mother), to the present (mother/artist), to her future (the unknown). However, the present of Baker's life is that she is an artist performing a piece in front of an audience at this moment. Does this actual presence of the live artist not therefore serve to interrupt her narrative of her past as a mother unable to be an artist? In her live presence, performing before us, we *know* that Bobby Baker will become/already is a mother/artist. The past that she reveals to us, therefore, is not sealed off but is necessarily inscribed with the present, as it is through this very present that she is able to raise the past. For example, as she lies down on the food-spattered painting and dry crumbs the evoked past of her illness is simultaneously juxtaposed with the visible wellness that is presented before us.[99] While Baker tells us that she was confined to her bed, the live representation of that episode reveals, before it is narrated, that the confinement would come to an end. The future of the past, then, is inscribed simultaneously with the evoking of that past. The neat distinctions of past and present, like truth and fiction, are blurred, the one blending into another, like the literal blending of Baker's desert mix.

Equally, the rememberings of the past are interrupted by the physically present body and its enactments in the present moment. Baker's sweating body in the space mixes with her previously pregnant body, just as her stained outfit carries traces of the past and the present on its surface. Also, as Baker tells us about her experiences, she interrupts the telling by vocally inserting the present through signalling what she is doing at this moment: 'Just delicately beginning at the corner', 'Don't worry, this isn't really it', 'So I thought it would be quite good', 'I'm going to introduce them'. Through such signals, Baker breaks up her stories of the past, therefore not allowing them to become discrete, fossilised moments, but moments in which the past and the present continuously

interact, in a sort of literalisation of the concept of memory being dependent on and infused by present positioning. As Baker wraps her memories around the body, she acknowledges that these (memories of her) experiences will be taken into the future and will continue to affect her subjectivity and future experiences just as that future will continue to impact on her past. This performance, then, is not so much teleologically ordered as performatively layered and interwoven.

In spite of all that I have written, something within this performance produces an unease within me, a feeling resonant with Linda Hutcheon's term 'complicitous inscribing'. Although Baker attempts to minimise the risks of reinscribing the marks of 'femininity' through a number of different strategies, there is a danger that she remains too firmly located within the prescribed areas of femininity. While she engages in resistant acts which serve to push at the boundaries of these locations, by transforming food into art, the dinner party into a Jackson Pollockesque paint splash etc., the boundaries are never totally broken down. While Baker partially resists the cultural inscriptions of housewife/mother and their corollary roles of procreating, caring and nurturing, she does not actively escape from them as they are all necessarily contained within her resistant acts since it is against these that the resistances are aimed.[100] She is then, 'both complicitous with and contesting of the cultural dominants within which [she] operates.'[101]

As stated in Chapter 3, however, I believe that it is only from *within* discourse that one can mount an attack *on* discourse, so it is not Baker's positioning within discourse, as such, that is problematic. It may be, however, that the roles she chooses to play are more complicitous than contestatory.

In the next Chapter, I wish to look at performances which continue to use and destabilise 'autobiographical' material and personal experiences. However, my main

interest in these performances is primarily that of determining whether one *can* enact resistances from within the system while avoiding the reinscription of cultural femininity in the process. These performances, I would suggest, negotiate this dangerous relationship between complicity and contestation by actively moving into inappropriate 'spaces' rather than performing from those 'spaces' marked as already appropriate for the female subject. Such a move, however, is no less fraught as the danger of re-inscription remains. What strategies then, are used to resist this re-inscription and how successful are they?

CHAPTER 5
INAPPROPRIATELY APPROPRIATE

ANNIE SPRINKLE - *POST POST PORN MODERNIST* (1994)[1]

What was this 42nd Street venue doing invading my performance space?

My problem was, if Sprinkle represented a female 'other,' she was also not 'other' enough. This was not taking place in a barn of a burlesque hall with an elevated stage, where I might fade into the balcony [...] and become an invisible or masqueraded spectator of a separate male culture with its different kind of female. In this space Sprinkle had entered my world.

Eleanor Fuchs[2]

Eleanor Fuchs is discomforted by the invasion of this 'other' into her space - this woman who is not a 'woman' in the way that Fuchs wants a woman to be or imagines herself to be. This woman is the 'bad girl' in the dichotomous structure of 'virgin/whore' and this bad girl has invaded the 'good' space of art, a space that Fuchs' 'owns', as a 'good girl'. The pornographic threatens the artistic, and, by association, threatens Fuchs position as the 'good' girl. It is such dichotomies and binaries that Annie Sprinkle sets out to reveal and explode (if only temporarily).[3]

Annie Sprinkle - virgin, prostitute, pornographer, performer, whore, artist, sexual healer, safe sex educator, goddess - the definitions and categories blur and blend and in that process the terms are opened up for examination. What is immediately apparent, when placing Sprinkle beside Bobby Baker, is the different signifying spaces that each occupies. Baker signifies (and troubles that signification) 'mother', the only appropriate space left for a woman after the 'virgin' signifier has been closed (and note here the collapse between them embodied by the Virgin Mother icon). Her inhabiting of this appropriate space is inappropriate - she behaves as an inappropriate mother. Sprinkle, on the other hand, in the main inhabits the inappropriate space - the pornographer, the

prostitute, the whore (passing through the 'virgin' on the way), but inhabits it appropriately to the female subject (although inappropriately to the signifier) - she is the safe sex educator, healer, nurse, goddess. The place of 'mother' is not actively figured here - although perhaps her very absence inscribes her presence.[4]

The CCA is a performance/gallery space located in one of Glasgow's main shopping streets, in the centre of the city. Its remit is to present innovative and challenging work, and it is known locally as the place to see the 'new' and the 'different'.[5] In 1994, in collaboration with its 'sister' organisation the ICA in London, the CCA presented a season of female performers and artists under the title *Bad Girls*, (thus signalling, immediately, the 'good/bad' divide), which included American performers Annie Sprinkle, Pamela Sneed and Penny Arcade.

The pre-publicity concerning Annie Sprinkle's show deliberately incited controversy by foregrounding her 'former' identity as a pornographer and prostitute and the 'sexually explicit' nature of her work, thus questioning the validity of her appearance in an art venue. However, what such publicity inadvertently raises are issues of 'context'. Would Sprinkle's show be read as 'pornography' or as 'art'? Would readings be dependent on whether the show was presented in a strip-club or in an art gallery? If definitions change depending on venue, how rigid and fixed are the definitions? What makes art art and porn porn? As C. Carr states, Sprinkle

> opened the Cleveland Performance Art Festival with the vice squad in attendance at both shows. [She] changed her act when police implied that the cervix piece would be grounds for arrest. The irony is that Sprinkle used to perform in Cleveland during her porn-star days, at a burlesque theater she describes as the 'wildest' place she's ever worked. She actually *did* live sex shows then, and the vice squad never even showed up.[6]

In this example, the vice squad, as representatives of the judicial system, served to literally police the boundaries of what could acceptably be shown in an art space, and

thus functioned as the arbiters of what could be considered as 'art' and what transgressed art by threatening its 'purity' or 'high' status.[7] Sprinkle's work was acceptable within the context of the sex-industry, but was deemed to be outside of the limits of 'good art'.

In Glasgow, however, the case could be seen as being somewhat different, even the opposite. Sprinkle was, in a sense, protected by the fact that she was appearing in an art venue, and her appearance at the CCA granted her the status of an artist and therefore allowed her a certain freedom. There are no strip-clubs or burlesque halls in Glasgow, and had one been established for Sprinkle to appear in, it would undoubtedly have been shut down prior to the show.[8] However, in a sense similar to the Cleveland scenario, what *was* being questioned in the pre-publicity was whether in fact her performance was 'art' or whether it was pornography, and therefore whether Sprinkle was 'really' an artist or in fact a pornographer. It was not so much Sprinkle who was being judged by the 'city' but the CCA for its programming.

In spite of such pre-publicity it seemed that many of the spectators at the performance were regular CCA spectators and not spectators who had turned out to be turned on.[9] However, this statement is a dangerous one to make. Is it not possible that some members of the CCA audience are also the actual and potential spectators of sex shows? The sex show spectator is not immediately visible, marked in some way as distinct from the CCA spectator. There is no such thing as 'the' CCA audience. There are individual audience members, each of which is a potential audience member for another venue. To divide the audience into those that watch art and those that watch sex shows is to raise the very same binaries that Sprinkle is intent on troubling. Equally, while the audience members may not have decided to attend the show exclusively for titillation, this does not mean that they were not titillated. What was immediately

apparent, however, is that the audience for *Post Post Porn Modernist* was a packed one. A fact in itself which raises questions. Fascination? Voyeurism? Desire? Interest? Politics? Loyalty? Research? The reasons as to why people flocked to this show are probably multifaceted, but unfortunately lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

The space contains a large bed, complete with lots of pink lace, a dressing table scattered with wigs and makeup, and a toilet. Sprinkle enters wearing a dressing gown. She tells us that she has not always been Annie and proceeds to show slides of her younger self juxtaposed with those of her present - Annie - self.

> I was born Ellen Steinberg, but I didn't like Ellen
> very much, so I invented Annie Sprinkle.
> Ellen was excruciatingly shy. Annie is an exhibitionist.
> Ellen was fat and ugly, and nobody seemed to want her.
> Annie is voluptuous and sexy, and lots of people want her.
> Ellen desperately needs attention. Annie gets it.
> Ellen wore orthopaedic shoes and flannel nightgowns.
> Annie wears six-inch spiked heels and sexy lingerie.
> Ellen was afraid of men and sex. Annie is fearless.
> Ellen was a nobody. Annie gets asked for autographs.
> Ellen wants to get married and have children.
> Annie wants fame and fortune.
> I suppose Ellen Steinberg really is Annie Sprinkle,
> and Annie Sprinkle is really Ellen Steinberg.[10]

A strategy that Sprinkle variously utilises within this performance is the crossing of Huyssen's 'Great Divide', first by the fact that a pornographer/prostitute is presenting her work in an art gallery, and secondly, by transferring what may have been taken from the lexicography of the sex industry into an art context. Art/porn, prostitute/artist are mixed together, neither totally one nor the other, forcing the spectator to question their supposedly distinct, original separation. During the interval audience members can have Polaroid photos taken of themselves sitting under Sprinkle's naked breasts. Speculums and 'cervical' button badges are for sale in the foyer. Sprinkle therefore also crosses the divide that separates the artistic from the commercial (the sacred from the profane).

mixing artist with salesperson, and whore with entrepreneur, closing the supposed gap between them, or suggesting that both words - 'artist' and 'whore' - offer multiple significations. (In the same gesture, Sprinkle questions the gap between 'client' and 'spectator'.)

Sprinkle not only uses the 'tricks' of the sex trade within her performance, she also draws from a mixed array of presentational forms, from both high and low culture. As she 'chats' to us, she is the host of a television show, as she dresses up she is an actress on the stage, or a demonstrator. Drawing on advertising and photographic traditions she uses slide presentations extensively within her piece as 'portraiture' shots. 'Educational' slides are also displayed, which shifts Sprinkle into the role of 'teacher', explaining the sex work industry to her 'pupils'. This 'educational' role is pushed to the extreme as she 'educates' the audience about female genitals through picture diagrams, with each anatomical part labelled. The 'diagram' is then replaced by the living flesh of the material body as audience members are invited to look at Sprinkle's cervix through a speculum. In this instance, the 'educator' has slipped into the 'nurse/doctor', which is rapidly slipping into the 'pornographer', but the 'pornographer' is speaking the discourse of the 'educator'. (Of course, there is a tradition of disguising pornography as educational material, as evidenced in early film pornography which masqueraded as 'sex education'. Sprinkle is, then, borrowing a historical 'guise'.)[11] Thus, as well as using multiple presentational devices, she also multiply locates herself, shifting and sliding through discourses and binaries as she does so, the catalyst for occasions of binary terror as discussed earlier.

It is impossible to pin Sprinkle down because she is forever on the move. Fluid. Her chosen name, Annie Sprinkle, within this context, is ironically appropriate. She took the name 'Sprinkle' for herself because she was 'attracted to the sound of *wetness* - I like

waterfalls, piss, vaginal fluid, sweat, cum - anything wet'.[12] And the wet, as we know, is seeping and uncontainable.

Most importantly, however, as is evidenced from the opening segment of the performance, quoted above, Sprinkle troubles any notion of the 'truth' of identity, or 'reality'. Sprinkle has invented herself, she is self-created, and that self-creation cracks any notion of a stable foundation, of an 'original' or 'natural' being that lies below the surface.

Certain theorists have suggested that Annie Sprinkle's performance reveals the performativity of gender.[13] Before exploring this assertion it is necessary to return to Judith Butler and her explication of gender performativity. Identity, as I have previously explicated, is largely the result of an exclusionary practice - I am this because I am not that. And, for Judith Butler, those that are excluded form the 'constitutive outside to the domain of the subject'. Those 'outside' inhabit the 'abject':

> The abject designates here precisely those 'unliveable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unliveable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject.[14]

Sprinkle, the prostitute, pornographer, sex worker, like those who have come before and after her, is an 'abject' woman. Like the prostitutes who are hurt or killed, Sprinkle does not/is not matter, because she is not 'really' a woman. (And we can hear the echo of Fuchs' comment here, that Sprinkle is an 'other'. Of course, Fuchs goes on to say that Sprinkle is also not 'other' enough, and while this may indicate that, as a woman, Fuchs is compelled to identify with Sprinkle - as an/other woman - is it not also possible to suggest that Sprinkle is not 'other' enough because what the good girl/bad girl binary disguises is the way in which women are *all* marked as 'bad girls', by the very virtue of their location in the negative position?)[15]

However, even outwith the dominant hegemony of heterosexual patriarchy, Annie Sprinkle remains one of the 'others'. In relation to certain strands of the feminist movement she (or what she symbolises) is variously chastised, pitied, accused of maintaining and aiding the continued oppression of women, perceived as a victim, male-identified, etc. Anti-pornography feminists perceive pornography as being intrinsically oppressive to all females and therefore anyone working within the sex-industry as complicit with that system of oppression.[16] As such they are either excluded from the feminist movement or regarded as women in need of 'saving'. 'To the Dworkin-MacKinnon anti-pornography faction, agency can only be located in resistance.'[17] I will later explicate Linda Williams' argument that Sprinkle finds agency through using pornography rather than just in resisting it. However, for now I wish to concentrate on this good/bad division that is explored and denaturalised in *Post Post Porn Modernist*.

Judith Butler states that:

> Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex (a juridical concept); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. Gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or a 'natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive,' prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts.[18]

What Butler is suggesting is that there is nothing 'natural' about sex, and that the belief in gender as expressing some intrinsic sexual difference is actually an act that constitutes the naturalisation of sex. That is, gender in fact upholds the myth of a 'natural' sex, as a variety of discourses assert that gender is the cultural expression of a pre-social sex. Conceptions of nature, she argues, are always cultural:

> This sex posited as prior to construction will, by virtue of being posited, become the effect of that very positing, the construction of construction. If gender is the social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this 'sex' except by means

> of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that 'sex' becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access.[19]

Butler proposes that gender is 'the effect of a regulatory practice that can be identified as compulsory heterosexuality'.[20] By regulating gender, making gender stable through disavowing or abjecting all that would threaten this sense of gender which is organised within a heterosexual matrix of male/female, masculine/feminine, '[t]he appearance of an abiding substance or gendered self [...] is [...] produced.'[21] If there is no natural sex which gender supposedly expresses, then

> gender proves to be performative - that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be [....] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results.[22]

That is, the 'gendered self' is the result of expressions of gender; gender acts constitute the notion of an essential identity as opposed to merely expressing that identity. However, it is in the *repetition* of such gender acts that a belief in the 'naturalness' of gender arises:

> Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.[23]

Furthermore:

> [gender] *produces* the illusion of an inner sex or psychic gender core; it *produces* on the skin, through the gesture, the move, the gait [...], the illusion of an inner depth. In effect, one way that gender gets naturalized is through being constructed as an inner psychic or physical *necessity*.[24]

If gender is a set of repeated acts which are not the expression of some 'natural' sex, then, importantly, it cannot be said that there is such a thing as an 'original' or 'primary' sex or gender, since:

> *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself [....C]ompulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of 'man' and 'woman,' are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real.[25]

It is precisely within (and because of) the performative nature of gender that the reified notion of gender and sex can be contested. If gender is the construction and maintenance of the fiction of an 'internal' essence that is marked on the external body surface through a '*stylized repetition of acts*', then the potential for making explicit the fictional status of both sex and gender is realised through a repetition that is different - a subversive repetition that would reveal 'the performative status of the natural itself'.[26] For Butler:

> gender is an 'act' [that is] open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of 'the natural' that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status.[27]

Returning to Sprinkle, then, where can such subversive acts be located? In the opening sequence of *Post Post Porn Modernist*, quoted previously, Annie Sprinkle immediately threatens any notion of a grounded, stable, core 'identity'.

> I was born Ellen Steinberg, but I didn't like Ellen
> very much, so I invented Annie Sprinkle.

While this first line may appear to reinstate the 'natural', I would suggest that what follows it in fact serves to trouble such a notion. Ellen and Annie are both, equally, constructions. Neither is more 'truthful' than, or the original of, the other. Annie Sprinkle was not 'born' Ellen Steinberg but was born, then named Ellen, and in that naming, given the sex of female and the gender of feminine. It is assumed, in the West, that there are two 'natural' sexes - male and female - decided on by biological features.[28] However, as Diane Elam points out, quoting Suzanne Kessler, when doctors are

confronted by genitals that are not unambiguously female or male, the doctor's task is to reveal the 'true' sex of the infant and assign it its sex accordingly. This 'true sex' is determined not on whether the genital is a penis 'but on whether it is "good enough" to remain one'. To be assigned a female sex is to have insufficient maleness. Kessler's article illustrates 'how physicians create a "natural" sex on the basis of shared cultural values about gender roles'.[29] I am not trying to suggest here that Annie Sprinkle is *not* female. What I am suggesting is that it is culture that brings the individual into being - one is not 'naturally' born an anything. Thus, Ellen Steinberg *became* Ellen Steinberg through cultural inscription. This raises striking similarities with Sprinkle's 'story' about 'becoming' a prostitute, and here I am reminded that the performative is an enacted process of 'becoming', rather than the production of a fixed 'is'.

> I was working in a massage parlor. For three months I worked and didn't even know I was a hooker - I was having such a good time! The men I saw were referred to as 'clients' or 'massages.' But finally, after about three months one woman used the word 'trick' and I realized, 'Ohmigod - they're *tricks!* Oh shit - I'm a *hooker!*'[30]

As Linda Williams states:

> Sprinkle only recognized herself as a whore - one who performs sex for money - in the word 'trick.' She never chose - in any liberal, Enlightenment sense of the exercise of free will - to become a whore. Annie Sprinkle found herself 'hailed' by an entire system of signification.[31]

So too did the 'good girl', Ellen Steinberg, the necessary flip side of the same coin who, being 'hailed' as Ellen, similarly finds herself positioned by 'an entire system of signification'.[32] The presence of the nominations good and bad serves to keep in place the system that would designate women one or the other, subjecting the female body to a regime of control. Without good there can be no bad and vice versa.

The destabilising of categories is furthered in 'The Transformation Salon' when Sprinkle presents 'before' and 'after' slides of women, first as 'regular people' and then

as 'sex stars'. The 'regular woman' is transformed into the 'sex star' - which image is the more 'real' (or 'Real')? It is this very notion of the 'real/Real' woman that is being contested, since both the 'before' and 'after' are cultural constructs, which can be read and given meaning only within pre-existing signifying systems. Moreover, it is the *same* woman in both pictures. However, is it not possible to suggest that since the 'after-shot' is a makeover, the previous shot is the 'original'? Remembering Butler's troubling of the original/copy binary, can we now say that the former is the 'original', since gender is always already an imitation of a fictional representation (serving to produce the fiction of 'natural' sex - of the 'real')? Both the 'before' and 'after' shots are produced, framed and understood by and within socially located discursive parameters.

Sprinkle's statement at the end of the 'Transformations', however, inserts a problematic spoke into reading the performance as deconstructive:

> Maybe there's a little porn star in you. Maybe not. But I can tell you from experience - there's a little of you in every porn star.

Rather than thinking of difference differently - a difference that resides *within* every subject, since every subject is constructed from exclusions (in Minh-ha's terms, the 'inappropriate other within every I'),[33] there is a suggestion that only the appropriate is contained within the inappropriate. This, I would suggest, serves in some ways to restabilise the good/bad binary at the same point as it would attempt to trouble it. That is, the 'bad' girls are not really 'so bad' because they are the 'same' as you. However, if this is read as 'true', then it does serve to close the gap between the two positions. At the same time, though, it serves to return difference to the Same - 'we're all really the same'. As Gerry Harris would posit, this sentence 'suggests a more essentialist view, in which intra-gender differences are always subsumed within sexual difference'. Harris'

specific critique is that the 'Transformation' photos transform different images of women into images in which the women are all the 'same':

> As a 'feminist' spectator, I was being positioned so as to identify with these images but the framing of the episode demanded an identification with the 'after' pictures (women as same) not the 'before' (women as different from each other).

Harris finishes her critique of this particular section by stating that:

> For me, the manner in which this socially and culturally constructed division between good girl/bad is produced, enforced, naturalised and internalised through 'terror' - remained unquestioned and so potentially reinforced.[34]

I find myself resisting both of Harris' statements here. If the first photos are themselves copies of a 'copy', how much difference exists between the images? While the second photos show even less difference, I cannot help wondering whether this also comments on the lack of difference in the previous ones. Woman as 'properly feminine', woman as 'whore' - both positions signify 'types', or moulds, in which we are located. In relation to Harris' latter statement, I would suggest that Sprinkle is actively showing the binary to be a construction through inhabiting more than one position simultaneously. She is both the 'good' and the 'bad' girl (or the 'good bad girl' *and* the 'bad good girl') - a situation which is supposedly impossible within a binary structure, where one is either one thing or another and where such polar opposites are required to keep the system in place. It is the insistence on the separation of the positions that enables an enactment of control over women's bodies - if you are not 'good' you will be/come 'bad'. However, I would agree with Harris that Sprinkle does not actually show the way in which the binary is enforced. But is it not also possible that Sprinkle's playing across the binary causes the binary construction to surface, therefore prompting a consciousness of our own actions in the maintenance of it? Returning to Fuchs, she writes that:

> The ambivalence I experience within and about this work, my sense of danger as a 'good' female spectator, results from a crack in *this* system: the systematic division of women into opposed sexual pools, and the replication of that division in an elaborated system of values within each female consciousness.

Fuchs goes on to quote Jacquelyn Zita, who

> points out that the 'pornographic apparatus' constructs two female populations, one to service the fantasies and 'secret realities' of male dominion over women, the other 'ignorant' and 'purified,' each operating as a 'necessary condition' to keep the system in place. 'It is often "good" women who do the work of separating themselves from female sex workers and maintaining an aura of purity and goodness for themselves.'[35]

While Sprinkle may not reveal this system within her performance, in this opening sequence she does reveal that what 'whore' symbolically denotes is a cultural artefact. The 'artificial' nature of the 'whore' is made explicit through both the 'Transformation' photos and through Sprinkle's 'how to' photo, where the method and means of becoming the archetypal construction are depicted.

This latter slide depicts the necessary accoutrements worn by Annie, describing their effects, such as 'Corset hides a very big belly. Makes my waist 41/2" smaller. Extra tall stockings make my legs look longer. Black stockings make my legs look thinner. Bra is a size too small to make breasts look bigger.' It is external markings that mark the 'whore', not some internal quality. Moreover, such markings are actively put on to play the role of the prostitute. The appearance of the 'other' of the 'good' woman is little more than an/other costume. However, what is equally important in this 'how to' photo is the fact that the material effects of such accoutrements on the body of woman are also depicted - 'These heels are excruciatingly high. My feet are killing me. Lungs restricted I cannot breathe.' The materiality of the real (physical) body underneath the 'props' is foregrounded and that body feels discomfort. The clothes do not 'fit' but sculpt the body into a particular shape. Being the image of a 'whore' is not 'natural', but

requires effort and agency (remembering, here, that being another type of 'woman' often requires the same effort and agency - applying of make-up, styling of hair, wearing of certain clothes and shoes).[36]

It seems evident that Sprinkle attempts to break down the boundaries between good/bad girl, through presenting 'herself' as an *effect* of performance. Not only does she make explicit the tools of her trade, she plays the role of the 'whore' to excess, in an excessive mimicking of the signifier 'whore'. Before our eyes the pre-whore body is transformed into the body of the whore - enormous breasts, spiked heels, wig, and sexy voice. The stereotypical, bimboish, 'heart-of-gold' prostitute is made up - literally and metaphorically - before our very eyes.

Linda Williams asserts that:

> Although Sprinkle 'is' a woman and doesn't perform otherwise, her exaggeratedly fetishised femme appearance is offered as a performative achievement, not as natural.[37]

I would argue, however, that it is not so much gender that is revealed as being performative, but that the performative nature of the 'gender' of the 'prostitute' is displayed (the prostitute signifying another 'type' of woman). Sprinkle does not stop being 'feminine' but the 'femininity' of the 'whore' is excessive and therefore actually falls beyond the boundaries of the 'proper feminine' - and it is this which Sprinkle reveals as constructed, not in any sense 'real.' In this sense, Sprinkle's performance is an example of Butler's exaggeration of the 'natural' that reveals 'its fundamentally phantasmatic status'.

Perhaps implicit within this display is the fact that all gender is a construct. Unlike Williams, however, I do not think that Sprinkle goes far enough in revealing the 'masquerade of femininity' - as opposed to the masquerade of the 'whore' - for this

reading to be justified. However, what Sprinkle does reveal is the oppositional poles constructed for women. On one side is the virgin, and her extension - the mother (reproductive sexuality); on the other is the whore (polymorphous, non-reproductive sexuality). While Ellen is the Virgin and Annie is the Whore, the body inhabiting these locations has not changed. It is the meanings that the body has been made to bear which have become different - the body has been discursively inscribed (in an attempt to curtail and control it). Of course, had Sprinkle stepped into the space of 'Mother', her body would again have (been made) to signify differently.

While the visible signifiers of the prostitute and the way in which she comes to be positioned and read can be denaturalised, what of the physical act of selling sex that would continue to separate the good girl from the bad girl? The selling of sex as a commodity is supposedly the performative act that raises the signifier 'whore'. And yet 'whore' extends beyond this signification (like any other signifier) signifying differently in various discourses. Whore is also, therefore, synonymous with victim, bad girl, provider, dirt, criminal, entrepreneur, etc. I would suggest that Sprinkle does not attempt to turn social perceptions of the bad whore into the good whore but to unsettle, from the outset, such binary divisions so that we may look at the prostitute or pornographer in a different way - a way that is neither absolutely good nor bad.

In the section of her performance entitled 'Pornstitistics', Sprinkle shows various slides of statistics concerned with her work in the sex industry, such as 'Why I Did It: Advantages', 'Why I Did It: Disadvantages'. Both slides consist of pie charts, with each segment divided up according to their importance to Sprinkle. The advantages include 'Money, Didn't know what else I wanted to do, Love and Attention, Creative Outlet, To Rebel against society, Glamour, I don't know why, Curiosity, Sex, I like the costumes [....]' Disadvantages include: 'I met some *horrible* people, Irreversible psychological

damage, I hurt my parents, Not enough money, I didn't want to work, Social disapproval, Became sexually jaded and confused, Felt like an object, Physical danger, It was hard sometimes.' What both slides reveal, then, are the contradictions implicit to becoming and being a prostitute. Sprinkle did not become one for any single reason and her experiences of being one ricochet between advantages and disadvantages. For example, she did it for the glamour but, paradoxically, one disadvantage is the social disapproval. These contradictory experiences that Sprinkle confronts reveal the discursive forces that produce such experiences. If the 'whore' was not made to signify negatively (in opposition to the 'good girl'), then Sprinkle would not have experienced 'social disapproval' and she may not have been placed in 'physical danger' (although experiencing such 'physical danger' is not exclusive to the 'whore', again suggesting that all women are, in a sense, 'bad girls'). By showing these contradictions, Sprinkle simultaneously shows the shifting and multiple subjectivities she occupies.

In another section of the performance, Sprinkle invites members of the audience to come and take photographs of her in sexual positions of their own choice. The fact that this would be included in the performance was presented in the pre-publicity. When I saw the performance, only one man walked down to the performance space with his camera and took a few photographs, including one of Sprinkle lying on her bed, with legs parted. Within the context of the performance space, however, it was not only Sprinkle that was on view for the man to photograph but the photographer himself - in fact, my own spectatorial eye strove to enclose them both, simultaneously, within my vision. Predominantly, however, I watched him watching her watching him. Lest anyone think that he was in control of the situation Sprinkle demanded from him that he should tell her how to 'pose' (there is nothing 'real' in the pornographic shot, just a series of composed shots. Again, the made-up and the real become confused - the made-

up photo pose, the made-up whore, the made up Sprinkle, the made-up performer before us - what is actually 'real'?). Sprinkle took control of the episode, offering the man suggestions, adopting poses that she herself had suggested, and although he may have controlled the shutter she controlled, to an extent, what the shutters would capture.

This blurring of subject/object positions was further accomplished in the section 'Public Cervix Announcement', in which spectators were invited to look at Sprinkle`s cervix with the aid of a speculum. Prior to this, however, as previously noted, Sprinkle presented an anatomical education 'lesson' on the female body, asking the audience to name different parts of the female sexual organs. This framed the later examination within that of sex education. However, clashing with this was the visual spectacle of Sprinkle in suspenders, legs parted, vagina revealed. Again, the pornographic and the educational become blurred boundaries, with Sprinkle literally straddling both in stiletto heels.

Importantly, Sprinkle held a microphone to each spectator as they peered at her cervix, prompting them to comment on what they saw, while also talking conversationally herself during each 'examination`. The distance that is required for any voyeuristic positioning on the part of the spectator is absolutely denied - the `voyeur` becomes a participant, with Sprinkle watching them watching her. Each person looking through the speculum is also being watched and is not allowed a distanced, anonymous position. As the spectators are looking at Sprinkle's cervix, it could be argued that she is objectifying herself. However, Sprinkle is also returning the gaze of the gazers, and in this sense, she is the subject of the gaze. Thus, the positions of subject and object circulate, rather than either belonging singularly to one person. Moreover, by asking the spectator to look deep inside her, the inside/outside division is destabilised, and the myth of the vagina dentata is perhaps confronted. This is not a dismembered `pussy` on show

but is connected to the live body in front of us. The fear and disgust circulating around woman's internal organs are challenged. As Rebecca Schneider writes:

> The display of the cervix becomes a kind of ludicrous moment in which voyeurism is taken to a certain extreme where the viewer encounters not an infinitely recessing negative space, a vanishing point of 'Origin,' but explicitly, and somewhat clinically, a cervix. If the cervix can be imagined as an eye, catching the viewer at the keyhole as it were, any horror that scene might occasion would be noted by the author, Annie Sprinkle, and remarked. 'Oh look,' she might exclaim, letting her audience in on the scene, 'Your eyes are erectile with horror!'[38]

Offering an alternative psychoanalytic reading through Luce Irigaray's text *Speculum of the Other Woman*,[39] Gerry Harris suggests that this part of the performance could be seen as a 'subversive repetition' or 'parody' of psychoanalytical discourse in which woman is figured only as a mirror for the male subject:

> Sprinkle promises the male spectator 'enlightenment', a full disclosure of 'woman', Freud's mysterious 'dark continent' and, indeed, the viewing of the cervix is facilitated by means of a torch. Yet, at the moment of seeing the maternal place of origin, what he sees looking back at him is the blinded eye, a reflection of himself as Oedipus.[40]

The person seen takes on an agency within the scene of the performance becoming the seer who turns the seer into the seen who is also the seer (although what s/he sees is the 'eye' of the cervix rather than the eyes of Sprinkle) - it is a visual exchange of reciprocity rather than of subject/object, seer/seen. While her 'goods' may be on display they are *actively* displayed by Sprinkle and those goods are not the 'bad' goods of the prostitute or the 'bad' goods of the 'good' woman (because the 'good/bad' breaks down at the scene of the internal female organs), but are the 'goods' belonging to Sprinkle. Prior to showing her cervix, Sprinkle explains to the audience why *she* wishes to do this - it is *her* agency that is foregrounded.

1. To demystify women's bodies.

2. To create a reality where there is no shame about genitalia.
3. Because the cervix is beautiful.
4. Because it's fun.
5. It's a way of saying to some men, 'You [...] want to see pussy [...] I'll show you more [...] than you ever wanted to see.'[41]

This notion of agency is, of course, one that is implicit to feminism(s). However, what is different in this case is that Sprinkle - who has been hailed as a 'whore' and who is therefore often presumed to lack agency - actually locates her agency within her 'whoredom.' As Williams suggests:

> Annie Sprinkle neither denies that she is a whore nor fights the system that so names her. Rather, she accepts the nomination; but in that acceptance also sees room for what Butler calls 'subversive repetition'. This subversive repetition becomes an articulation of something that is not named in 'whore': her own desire.[42]

The function of the prostitute is to satisfy the desire of the paying customer (and as stated, in the context of this show there is a slippage here between 'customer' and 'spectator'. We, too, have paid our money and expect certain 'results'.) The idea of the desiring prostitute is at odds with this conception, and the fact that Sprinkle reveals her desire *within* the system that would posit her as object to the desiring subject is an instance of 'a taking up of the tools where they lie' and using them with a difference - or repeating the 'act' of 'whore' differently.[43]

Williams goes on to suggest that these subversive repetitions

> consist of an ever-widening range of sexual acts, or 'perversions' which expand the notion of what sexual performance is, and sexual objects, conventionally not regarded as acceptable objects of desire - dwarves, burn victims, transsexuals, persons with Aids, amputees - which allow her to explore her desires in new ways.[44]

Examples of these explorations of her desires are found in the slide presentation of 'Men I Have Loved', which depicts Sprinkle's sexual partners, with each of their particular areas of sexual expertise described. Rose Illet criticises Sprinkle for this section of the

show, maintaining that these slides cannot help but be juxtaposed in the minds of the viewers with the previous ones, the slides of 'normal' bodies, and asserts that it 'is impossible not to be reminded of ideas of the freak show'.[45] However, disagreeing with this, I would suggest instead that it is precisely such notions of 'normal' and 'abnormal' that Sprinkle is attempting to trouble. As more and more pictures flash onto the screen, the types of bodies become more and more diverse, and the range of the 'human' body expands. There is no 'normal' - there is just a proliferation of differences which threatens the division of the two terms. Of great importance within this section is that bodies assumed to be 'abnormal' bodies - therefore not fully human and again the abject - are presented as being fully sexual, within the realm of the human.[46] This sexuality, however, is activated against the realm of the fictional 'normal' heterosexuality, with its equally fictional focus on reproduction. Here sex is not simply about male penetration of the female organ. Sex is as diverse as the people who are having sex. It crosses genders, sexes, bodies - as is made most explicit in the picture of a transsexual who has retained his/her former clitoris, so that s/he now has both a clitoris and a penis. The bodies in these pictures cannot be relegated simply to male or female, masculine or feminine but slide across the categories, just as the sexual practices that are acted out cannot be neatly categorised. Like the fictional status of the original gender or sex, there is no original, true sexuality and any such notion is revealed as a construct which supports (and performatively produces) the system of heterosexuality. Who has the right to label something as normal/abnormal, normal/perverted? And what system is such a labelling protecting? The hegemonic system of fictional heterosexuality must hide its unruly 'others' in order to maintain its stability. As Chris Straayer suggests:

> By expanding the understanding of heterosexuality to acknowledge innumerable and diverse desires and practices (including certain activities shared by

> homosexuals and bisexuals), Sprinkle effectively contests the equation between homosexuality and deviance as well as the boundaries between homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual.[47]

Within this proliferation of sexuality, where is Sprinkle's own desire located? In the performance and the numerous interviews with Annie Sprinkle that are in circulation, Sprinkle asserts again and again that, for her, sex is the most interesting thing in the world, that sex is good for you, that it is therapeutic, that through sex one can learn about life.[48] Sprinkle *enjoys* sex, actively seeks it, perceives it as her area of expertise. Even when trading sex for money, she strives to satisfy or feed her own sexual desire.

While I would agree with Williams that this is performing the role of the 'whore' differently, enabling the 'hooker' to have agency, I also think that this agency, linked as it is to the 'positive' aspects of sex, is problematically foregrounded within the text, particularly when Sprinkle introduces us to Anya. However, at the same time, Anya furthers the unsettling of the stable, unified subject, being the latest creation in the life of Ellen/Annie - so that now it is Ellen/Annie/Anya (Virgin/Whore/Goddess). As Sprinkle says:

> Now, the show (and my life) has evolved to the point where I've invented a new personality. After 19 years of being 'Annie Sprinkle,' now there's '*Anya*'.[49]

In the show, Sprinkle tells us:

> Annie Sprinkle loves everybody; Anya loves herself.
> Annie Sprinkle seeks attention; Anya seeks awareness.
> Annie Sprinkle is a feminist; Anya is a goddess.
> Annie Sprinkle wants a career, fame and fortune;
> Anya wants peace, love and freedom.
> Annie Sprinkle likes an animal attraction;
> Anya likes a spiritual connection.
> Annie Sprinkle loves men.
> Anya loves men but absolutely adores women.
> Annie Sprinkle likes sex with transsexuals, midgets and amputees;
> Anya makes love to the sky, mud and trees.

> Annie Sprinkle masturbates;
> Anya meditates while she masturbates.
> Of course, Anya *is* today only because Annie Sprinkle
> *was* yesterday.[50]

In this final section of the performance, divided into 'New Ancient Sex (Theory)' and 'New Ancient Sex (Practice)', the female body is reconstructed as a sacred temple:

> Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, in ancient cultures such as Sumeria, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Greece, there were no whore-houses or street walkers [....] Instead at that time, there were Temples of the Sacred Prostitutes.
>
> The Sacred Prostitutes were highly respected members of society, considered by all people to be powerful healers, counselors and magicians [....] They were taught everything there was to know about sacred sex by the elder priestesses; their well-tended bodies were trained to be channels for the Divine [....] The most essential elements of their love-making sessions were prayer and ritual. Sex was their path to enlightenment, their creative and spiritual discipline.
>
> People went to a Sacred Prostitute to be cleansed, healed, nourished and pleasured. Her temple was breathtakingly beautiful [....]
>
> They would go into a state of sexual ecstasy because that was the best time to pray and to have visions and if there was a war or plague they could create miracles when they were in this state of sexual ecstasy.[51]

If one takes this retelling of the ancient legends as 'truthful', then it serves to highlight the difference in the status of prostitute then and now, and reveals the extent to which the discourses which construct, mark and effect bodies are historically and socially located. The prostitute, in this story, is sacred, not profane.[52]

This 'Theory' section is followed by the 'Practice' section in which Anya reclaims the sacred of the past and inserts it into the present, translating theory into practice. Each audience member is given a rice-rattle to shake to music that is playing, while Anya is surrounded by burning candles. She covers herself in oils, and begins to touch her body sensuously in a 'masturbation ritual'. Using a vibrator, and encouraged by the audience's participation, Anya enters into a 'trance' state, aiming to achieve an orgasm. (Did she fake it? Would we know? Would we care?) As well as drawing on

the powers of the sacred prostitutes, Anya 'calls on an erotic tradition evoking the spirits and knowledge from ancient tantric and Taoist masters, Native American teachers, the Phoenix fireman and firewoman, the geishas [...]'.[53]

On one level, this section could be read as a powerful display of women's sexuality. Anya is touching herself, for herself. The orgasm she achieves is by and for her alone, while the audience is permitted to participate in the ritual. There is an over-riding sense that this is a 'New Age' performance, in that it is returning to the 'Old Age' to 'purify' the present, to make the present somehow more wholesome, showing the way to 'enlightenment'. Such a reading, however, must be grounded in the 'sincerity' of the performance. How do we know that this is not a parodic display of such New Age mysticism? Or that the 'legends' are not, in fact, stories made up by Sprinkle? Is Sprinkle attempting to present a 'Truth' here?[54]

In the earlier sections of the performance, Sprinkle destabilises the given by playing the signifier 'whore' to excess. By contrast, Anya seems intently serious. This last section does not read as an excessive mimicking or parody of some 'primitive' sexual ritual, but as a 'recreation' of that ritual without any excessive staging.

However, Harris offers a timely warning here, stating that she is only too aware, 'as Sprinkle surely is, that "pornography" and "performance" are both realms where it is foolish to start bandying about terms like "authentic", "truth" and "real".'[55] In spite of the lack of excessive mimicry, it would be misguided to promote this latter section of the performance as intentionally more 'real' than the previous sections, for once again we are in the world of self-invention.

The statement 'Of course, Anya *is* today only because Annie Sprinkle *was* yesterday', suggests that without the Annie there would be no Anya - but Anya, like Annie, is made up. While this invented status of Anya again refuses to provide a secure

ground of reference, there does remain something in this latest transformation which troubles me, perhaps an echo of the word 'evolve', prompting the concept of 'progression' both within the performance and within the invented life of Sprinkle. The move from virgin to whore to Goddess seems almost predictable and while the Goddess space is refigured by being inappropriately inhabited by the 'whore', the 'whore' here is figured as 'sacred' weakening this potentially radical appropriation. This last position, I would suggest, risks leaving intact or even reinforcing the binary between good and bad that Sprinkle has attempted to dissolve. If the good girl is figured in the symbolic or culture as having no sex, and the bad girl as having too much sex, then the figure Sprinkle attempts to conjure, through Annie, is the girl who questions those positions by being neither one nor the other. Anya, however, reinscribes the whore as good by placing her in a Sacred space. In contrast to the whore who is not fully human, the Goddess is better than human. But both spaces are linked by their beyond the human, their unhumanness. However, Anya - by her very Goddess status - seems to re-mark the 'bad girl' who has lots of physical sex, separating herself from this signifying space by figuring the sexuality of the Goddess differently - inscribing her as something of a Go(o)dgirl. If Ellen was 'asexual', and Annie was 'overly sexual', Anya is spiritually sexual. In an era when AIDS has threatened sexual practice, Anya shifts the terrain of sexuality away from physicality to sensuality. While this move could be read as being ethically responsible, it also suggests that the body of the Goddess is beyond the material world (Anya is not a feminist), beyond the material body, beyond flesh and human desires, and therefore beyond reproach. If she is beyond this world, what is she challenging or contesting? Moreover, if the 'good whore' can be conceived as such only through inhabiting the figure of the Goddess, there is a suggestion that such a signifying space is impossible within the material world.

Finally, while Anya is no more real than Annie or Ellen and can be seen to be just another example of Sprinkle's fluid identity, and in this sense Sprinkle is truly performative, I am left wondering where she can move to next. What is there beyond the Divine?

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I have to put my hands up and insert my own confession here.[56] There is something missing in all of the above. Something I have been trying to deny, hide, forget. In attempting to define the positive possibilities and potentials offered by this performance I have been performing the role of feminist academic, and what I have so far written is informed by that positioning. However, 'critic' is not my only position, even if I do choose to foreground it above. Is the 'spectator' that I have been talking about me? Partly. Partially.

The alternative path through sections of the performance that I offer below is largely prompted by (and indebted to) Gerry Harris, who writes that theorists such as Chris Straayer and Linda Williams 'tend to focus on Sprinkle as the producer of meanings' and that '"subversion" is accredited to Sprinkle as "author"', while the spectator is positioned as 'fixed and stable'. Harris' task, in contrast, is:

> to examine how Sprinkle's live work might be described as producing shifting and contradictory identifications *in the spectator*, in a manner that might foreground identity as discursively constructed.[57]

In *writing* the above text I felt accepting of Sprinkle's difference (the difference in me), and empowered by her challenge to the good/bad divide. I located myself, then, as being the 'better' feminist than Fuchs. And yet - and yet, what *happened* when I *saw* the text of the performance? In the moment of my watching it, what did I feel?[58] Or,

perhaps more revealingly, what did I do? Unlike Harris, I did not go on the 'rides' offered in this 'carnivalesque' performance. I did not get a Polaroid photo taken of Annie's breasts resting on my head (what would the face that stared back out of the photo say to me in the present and the future?), although I did buy the button badge of an (unrecognisable) drawing of the cervix. I did not go and look at Annie's cervix. I did, however, shake the rattles, and 'urge' her on to orgasm - along with everyone else around me. (The anonymity afforded here is important in relation to what I am about to write.)

What, then, does my (lack of) action signify about the way I responded to this performance? Like Harris and Fuchs, I experienced ambivalence, and a shifting of identity positions. Was this shifting similar to that displayed by Annie?

In parts of the performance I felt embarrassed - although the roots of this embarrassment are probably multiple. Embarrassed by the revealed female body, and by association my own revealed-in-your-imagination female body. Like Harris and Fuchs, I know that Sprinkle is a woman, like me. And yet I am also *not* embarrassed by the naked body, seeing it as strangely familiar, comforting. Brought up by parents who supported the nudist movement in Britain my childhood memories are of the body released from the confines of clothing. And yet in turn I become embarrassed by this memory, remembering in its place the increasingly awkward feelings prompted by the (inevitable?) coming of the age when I resisted what had become a family imposed ideology. But the naked body here, in front of me, is not just 'any' naked body, it is the 'prostitute' body - and so, immediately, the binary between good/bad, me/her, mother/her is re-erected. The nudity on display in childhood memories is different to Sprinkle's nudity - this difference marks her as 'different'.

Both embarrassed and not embarrassed, then. But is my embarrassment caused by her or for her? I did not get a Polaroid photo taken because I felt that it would be an embarrassing act, for both Sprinkle and myself: having a woman place her breasts on my head while someone else takes a photo and then handing over £3.50 to Sprinkle - 'I don't think so'. My resistance was not due to the fact I felt it would unnecessarily objectify Sprinkle (and by association other women), or be an act of exploitation on my part (although my embarrassment *for* her does suggest this, so this reading cannot be completely ruled out), but because I felt, simply, that it would be *ridiculous*.

Here, then, another of my locations is beginning to surface, and the performance causes it to react in a somewhat ambiguous and contradictory manner; binaries are not just being revealed and crossed in the performance but also in myself. I imagined that the act of attending this performance was itself performative - it inscribed me as 'cultured', 'hip', 'liberal' - marking me as liberated. This implies, then, that Sprinkle's show (and Sprinkle herself?) was positioned by me (and the Glasgow tabloids) as being a little bit risky, too hot to handle for some, but not for me, and the proof lay in my act of 'consumption'. On the one hand, then, by marking myself as liberated, I simultaneously and necessarily mark Sprinkle as the 'other' by positioning her as 'exotic' (which, although not a precise return to the good/bad, is close). On the other hand, however, I did not 'consume' her because I did not go and get a Polaroid photo taken of Sprinkle's breasts resting on my head. Because it all seemed too 'tacky' and 'cheap'.

As a regular performance art spectator I imagine I have invested continuously in my cultural capital. At the same moment as my academic self is insisting on Sprinkle's potential to blur high and low, my 'cultural' self actually responds by reinserting the binary. This is just too 'cheap' for me to desire to participate in it. Such an action on my part would reduce - and therefore threaten - my cultural capital. My resistance,

however, is also a remarking, in the sense that I am made aware of the binary, and also of my own contradictory, and shifting, discursive positioning.

What of the public cervix examination, though? As my friends queued up to take a peek, I sat, fixed resolutely to my chair, refusing to get up and walk along the row of people, descend the stairs, stand in the queue at the front of the performance space, bend down, hold the torch, look and speak into the microphone. What stopped me? I felt too self-conscious. Which has more than one meaning here.

Sprinkle's revealing of her cervix makes me conscious of my own body, and its sameness to hers. (The good/bad dissolved through similarity). Self-conscious also implies, however, that I feared the exposure of my (spectating) self. I did not want to step into the performance space, and thus become a 'performer' in this scene. I wanted to be a spectator, remaining outwith the spectacle. Since the other spectators could not possibly see anything from the distance of their seats, all they would (be able to) look at would be me looking. And I did not want to be seen looking. But why not? This was an invite. I was being invited to look at a part of anatomy that I share and yet have never seen. For the first time, I would get a sight of a previously hidden part of myself. Where is the violation in that?

Something else is troubling me here aside from my fear of being exposed to the audience, and this trouble is produced by a double spin on the word 'exposure'. I feared exposure - being exposed as a...

Let me put this in context. For a few years prior to this performance I had been identifying myself as neither straight, nor lesbian, nor bisexual, just sexual. By the time of this performance I was heavily involved in a relationship with another woman, and the pressure to 'come out' was mounting from all points on the sexual spectrum. 'You're a lesbian; you're not a real lesbian; just admit you're bisexual; just admit you're flirting

with the idea; just admit you're too scared to admit you're a lesbian; just admit you're sitting on the fence; just admit it's only a phase; just admit you're kidding on - you're really straight/lesbian/bisexual.'

My resistance to 'looking' was induced by my difficulty at identifying myself, locating myself anywhere. Who would I be when I looked? What would my spectatorial gaze *be* (read as)? At this point, I did not want the ground on which I was standing to be fixed (by myself or someone else), believing that such fixing would be permanent, irreversible, and not 'true' (I *was not* always a lesbian, *or* always 'straight'.) My fear of exposure, then, was both a fear of self-exposure and of public exposure. How would I react when I looked at Sprinkle's cervix? What if I was disgusted? What if fear marked my face? Alternatively, what if desire was written there instead? Or what if others, looking at me looking, inscribed my look as desiring anyway? I feared that other people, wanting to mark me as 'lesbian', might themselves desire to interpret my look as voyeuristic. And such an interpretation would mark me as an inappropriate voyeur, since this was intended to be an 'educational' observation (and here, again, I unconsciously reinscribe another binary).

My response earlier to the man who had taken photos of Sprinkle had been one of embarrassment for him. I felt he had exposed his 'sordid' desires. Such a reaction, then, served to re-establish the binaries of porn/art, sacred/profane, rather than dissolving them. In spite of the unsettling potential of this performance my position as 'feminist' reinscribed that which was being dissolved. If I inscribed him as being a desiring subject (and therefore, inspite of what I have written, Sprinkle as the 'object' of desire), might I not also be inscribed in the same way? Be exposed as looking for the wrong reasons, for the non-feminist reasons? 'We all know why she's looking' or 'See. There's the proof'.

Worse. Annie Sprinkle might think I was a voyeur. She might even say something to me. She might say 'Here's a lesbian. And what do *you* think of that?' as she held the microphone to my mouth. And I might be rendered speechless (or I might say the wrong thing). And everyone who knew me would laugh, because it would either confirm their 'suspicions' - 'we always knew', or clash with what they believed me to be - 'No she isn't!' It seemed that whatever way I turned I would be positioned as a fraud. The power of categories to fix is foregrounded in my panicked response to this performance and it is a painful reaction.

Appropriately, then, in a show in which the binaries are being troubled, I am experiencing my own binary terrors and they are literally immobilising me. And yet, in another sense, they are not immobilising me as my spectatorship is far from passive. Instead, I am reactive, and responsive. I may not have got off my seat, but in my mind I have travelled to a hundred terrifying places. And yet, somewhat ironically, in a very real sense I am unable to *move*. My desire to remain unfixed has fixed me. In a performance which foregrounds desire and fluidity you would expect there to be an identification between Sprinkle and myself. And yet my own lack of ground produces not liberation, not production, but inaction and an inability to identify *at all*, not even as a 'woman', because I do not know what sort of 'woman' I am, or will become, in relation to the sort of woman Sprinkle 'is' (and here again, paradoxically, in my moment of awareness of my own unfixed subjectivity, I resort to fixing *her*). I do not know how to look at her. I have not yet decided what (all) my desires are, so how can I act on them? In spite of her seeming groundlessness, from where I am sitting Sprinkle appears to be very grounded - because although she shifts, these moves are self-activated rather than imposed (not denying that these shifts are directed towards such potential impositions); in a sense she has produced her very *fluidity* as her ground.[59]

From the place of 1998 it seems obvious that Sprinkle acted as a screen for the projection of my own crisis in 'identity', a crisis that was being played out during the act of my spectatorship. This crisis, however, served to reveal the fluidity of my own 'identity'. The remembering of my reaction to the piece is now itself a cause for embarrassment. But then, a lot can change in the space of four years. Including, of course, Sprinkle.

POST POST-SCRIPT

For those who would seek to fix Annie Sprinkle as sexual liberator, sexual radical, sexual freedom fighter, there is another twist in the tale of Annie Sprinkle. In an interview in 1996, it appears that Sprinkle has shifted again. As I have not seen any performance that inserts this latest transformation, I will quote it in some length.[60]

> I used to get fucked really hard. It would turn me on. But what gives us an orgasm isn't always necessarily good for us. [...] Pin-ups can portray a powerful woman, but ultimately the model is vulnerable, submissive and available. Shit, I sound like the people I used to debate against. [...] I used to be very pro-high heels, for example, and people would question me about that from different perspectives. Now I'm starting to understand what they were talking about. My initial response had been, 'They're only shoes, what does that have to do with anything?' But I think there's a connection to a larger picture. There are deeper issues. [...] I didn't get along with women until I was about 35. By then, I'd met enough really great women to think they were maybe OK, and in my work, I started liking my female peers more than the men. Then I took a women's studies course at the School of Visual Arts, which really changed me. I hadn't been educated until then about what a feminist was, or how unfairly women were treated. That course made me a feminist. [...] Gradually I stopped being with men and I became a full-on lesbian.[61]

The discursive structure and power of feminism(s) is revealed here. (And I am tempted to say that 'feminism has a lot to answer for'. There is also a certain irony, since it is mostly feminists - including me - who write about Sprinkle's work, locating it as having

postmodern feminist potential). Sprinkle has *become* a feminist. In another recent interview Sprinkle says:

> With women relationships are a much deeper experience, much deeper emotionally. [...] It's like all the heavy S&M I was into. I've really changed my mind about it. Personally, at this point in my life, I don't want to perpetuate images of sadism and masochism, slavery and bondage. [...] It's time to be myself.[62]

But who is this 'self' that it is time to be? Another self? A new self? Or does she mean that she has finished playing and now the 'real' self will be revealed? This self, it seems, is the self constructed within feminist discourse. No more 'real' than any other. Annie Sprinkle (Ellen/Annie/Anya), with each transformation, seems to be throwing representations into her own personal *abyme* - each of which affects previous representations. We do not yet know what Annie Sprinkle is, never mind what she will become or *will yet have been*.

What I would like to know though is, if Sprinkle were to show me her cervix now, would I look and how would I look?

KAREN FINLEY - *THE CONSTANT STATE OF DESIRE* (1986)[63]

I was never considered talented by many conservative journalists. Although I've been schooled and educated, I was dismissed as a hysterical female by most of the press. Which proves my point about what I'm trying to fight: the female is only looked at as a sexual object and then she becomes the harlot, the whore, the evil witch. And I was given that position with my work. And that's the reason why I have to continue doing the type of work I do.

Karen Finley[64]

In this second section I wish to concentrate on Karen Finley's *The Constant State of Desire*. While I will largely be using the spoken text of this performance, which has been printed, it is important to note that Finley's performance style also incorporates the non-scripted, with ad-libs and asides directed to the audience in a conversational manner. Thus, no two performances of the piece are presumably identical.[65] Interestingly, Finley does not call this work 'performance' because it is not a singular, one-off event, but is repeated. Instead, she terms it a 'performance procedure', because although it is repeated, 'I change it, I change the act [....]'[66]

A strange irony asserts itself when reading theoretical critiques of this performance (including this one) - namely, that different interpretations of what 'the constant state of desire' actually *is* abound. On the one hand, this would explicitly indicate Finley's strategy of refusing to close down the proliferation of meanings that circulate within her performance. Like Sprinkle, Finley does not provide one viewpoint or one message and, in an even more extreme manner, refuses to posit a stable subject of performance. Where Sprinkle never quite loses the 'female-feminine', although she may implicitly question the system that constructs this figure, Finley attempts to shake off even gender while simultaneously revealing gendered positions. In the performance she becomes the female child, the mother, the son, the commentator, the feminist, the wife,

the artist (note, however, that she never actually becomes 'the father', but Finley's 'father' is paradoxically everywhere, as I shall go on to explicate), slipping and sliding through subject positions, changing in the middle of recitations into another gender. simply by changing the pronoun. In her performances Finley performs in a 'trance state', acting as a conduit for different voices. She does not take on any 'character' or act out any roles, and the text she speaks is disjointed and non-linear, with no narrative through-line connecting all the different voices. In this respect, it is impossible to regard what Finley speaks as a monologue that belongs to a particular character. As Vivian M. Patraka states:

> without the 'plot' of revelation attached to the life of a particular character, there can be no 'talking cure': the voice untethered from either character or performer conveys that what has to be changed is both larger and more political.[67]

While the voices that she speaks may not be her own, the body that she uses to 'channel' such voices is materially present. She is both the material body present before us *and* the body of others.[68]

Throughout the performance we witness a plethora of voices competing with each other. None take precedence. I am left reeling on a ground that keeps turning beneath my feet. Like Sprinkle's ground, however, this ground is inappropriate: Finley is the 'obscene' body and the obscenely revengeful body. The space she occupies is not that of the passive feminine.

This attempt to define the 'desire' indicated in the title of the piece ironically suggests that at the heart of the critic's act of theorising lies a desire to control, to master, to suppress the unruly by naming it/claiming it. Thus Jon Erickson posits (without a hint of self-consciousness) that the 'obsession that Finley articulates is [...] the desire for absolute control and mastery which in turn promotes abuse at every level,'[69]

while Maria T. Pramaggiore suggests that 'Finley exposes the modern patriarchal/capitalist subject's literally insatiable desire for a controllable representation of the female body'.[70] Finley herself states that *The Constant State of Desire*[71] is about '"womb envy". Not penis envy, but womb envy'.[72]

Of course it is difficult not to suggest an underlying theme when one wishes to analyse a performance. However, there is no one interpretation guaranteed within the piece even if one was intended. As Finley herself writes, in response to an article written by Catherine Schuler which suggests that Finley's performance fails as a feminist performance because female spectators do not 'understand' it:

> it's alright if yellow means biology, feminism, or the destruction of the housewife's kitchen, for that matter - to her. If someone sees yellow and they see jealousy, fine. If someone else looks at yellow and sees happiness, so be it. Interpretation makes people think and reflect back on their own lives.[73]

Any reading of the concept of the constant state of desire - foregrounded within the performance text - requires a brief return to psychoanalysis. Desire, as indicated in Chapter 2, is inculcated at the moment that the child enters into language and is 'split'. As Kaja Silverman writes:

> Desire commences as soon as the drives are split off from the subject, consigned forever to a state of non-representation and non-fulfilment. In short, it begins with the subject's emergence into meaning. Desire has its origins not only in the alienation of the subject from its being, but in the subject's perceptions of its distinctness from the objects with which it earlier identified. It is thus the product of the divisions by means of which the subject is constituted, divisions which inspire in the subject a profound sense of lack.[74]

Language stands in for the real object, and as such signals (and *is*) the absence of that object. Language is not present to itself but is composed of difference. According to psychoanalytic theory, when we enter into language we are severed from the Real - that which is beyond signification, outwith the symbolic order. In the imaginary, we conceive

ourselves as being 'full' and 'complete' - not a subject split by difference. It is to this imaginary state of wholeness that we wish to return, where one imagined it was possible to have access to the Real - especially the Real of the mother's body. Desire, then, is the desire to return to this state of wholeness.

If subjects experience a fundamental 'lack' - lacking both access to the Real and the imaginary wholeness that precedes entry into language (and therefore subjectification) - then any attempt to fill up that lack must necessarily fail, since our very construction as subjects depends on that lack, and the wholeness is, in any case, imaginary. But this feeling of 'lack' persists throughout life, and as such, our desire to fill it up can be nothing but insatiable - or 'constant'.

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> Finley re-performs, across her body, the myriad patriarchal terrors and desires woman has been inscribed to contain. She opens 'her' box to find, instead of some true body or some pure self, a cacophony of socio-cultural disturbances - 'all the evils of the world.' Her 'vision' is, then, a replay in excess of the way she has been envisaged to contain and symbolize patriarchal anxiety.[75]

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Finley's appropriation of psychoanalytical discourse produces a tremor at both the heart of this production (although it is problematic to talk of centres here) and the critic's attempts to write about it. This tremor is produced as a result of the difficulty in determining whether Finley is using psychoanalysis to critique the Western social world, or is, in fact, critiquing this theory which would attempt to describe and explain this world, while also critiquing society. There is an undecidability within the text between Finley's ideological position, the 'world' in which she is located, and the theory that she chooses to utilise. Not wishing to dissolve this tension, I would suggest that the attack is multiply aimed at both the theory and the 'world', while simultaneously signalling the danger of utilising a single metanarrative to explain entire social systems. Finley mirrors

my own paradoxical simultaneous appropriation and criticism of Lacanian psychoanalysis to explain sexual difference - a paradox that induces constant anxiety. Finley, then, works *within* the discourse of psychoanalysis, both using and resisting it. As Lynda Hart similarly suggests, Finley

> does not merely imitate the body in pain. Rather, she *mimics* the psychosocial structures that describe, theorize, and construct the patriarchal female body. Her performances enlist the possibilities for multiple, shifting identifications that psychoanalytic discourse permits without abandoning a materialist critique. In the gaps between her rhetoric and performance, she negotiates the psychic/social split that troubles the feminist project of enlisting psychoanalytic concepts in a materialist critique.[76]

Thus, while Finley acknowledges that we are all motivated by desire, she simultaneously critiques both the destructive way in which this desire is played out in the 'real' world and the theory that would seek to explain the roots of such 'playing out' without acknowledging its own discursive power at reinscribing and maintaining the (normalised) form of this 'playing out'.

Finley has been criticised for this mimicking of her representation in discourse. For example, Jill Dolan writes that:

> Because she is mired in the corporeality of her own flesh as it has been abused in the system of representation, she never takes flight into sexual and gender fantasies of liberation.[77]

However, as there is no utopian beyond to which we can escape, it is the way in which Finley works within discourse that I wish to document here. As the attacks are multiple, so too are the strategies that are utilised. In opposition to Dolan, I would suggest that Finley does take flight into fantasies of liberation - but perhaps not the fantasies that Dolan would wish to fly to.

One of the central tenets of psychoanalytic theory, as I have already stated, is that the subject is created in language. 'Language', and the way in which it used, becomes

both Finley's primary object *and* tool of attack. She uses language upon itself. As Finley takes on different multiple voices within her performance, including those of 'men', the posited spoken gender produces a dissonance with the materially marked female body. The inscribed 'female' body of Finley frequently speaks with a 'male' vocabulary, highlighting the very gendered nature of supposedly neutral language.

Additionally, through taking on the gendered language of 'male' subjects, it could be said that Finley is also parodically, excessively showing the Lacanian thesis and going beyond it - gendered subject positions are not only constructed in language but are also continuously reconstructed, reiterated or performed, within it. Language, then, becomes performative, and through using language one continuously re-enacts and repeats one's gendered positioning as either male/female, active/passive. However, when the words and the body clash, when the repetition is enacted differently, gender distinctions become simultaneously revealed and confused. Is the speaking subject male or female? To what extent are spoken language and sexual difference aligned?

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> Within the Lacanian argument the signifier is the mark of the subject's radical alienation from the real - from its organic nature, from actual mothers or fathers, or from any phenomenal experience. Thus the signifier 'father' has no relation whatsoever to the physical fact of any individual father. Instead, that signifier finds its support in a network of other signifiers, including 'phallus', 'law', 'adequacy' and 'mother', all of which are equally indifferent to the category of the real.[78]

Finley actively contests this notion of the signifier being removed from the 'real' by revealing the impact of the signifier on the materially present body. 'Woman' may be a symbol that bears no relation to living women, but the material female body bears the real impact of such symbols on its flesh. In replaying such impacts across her body, I would suggest that Finley is consciously making her body a drag on signification. While

the female body may *symbolise* 'lack', Finley turns the symbolic into the literal, playing the 'negative' across her body - female as literally object, abject, hole. The space between signifier and signified, between 'symbol' and 'real woman', is denied.

Similarly, while the phallus is also said to be a symbol, without a signified, and therefore no one can 'have' the phallus since it is not a real organ, in Finley's piece those who wield power are those who have a penis - the symbol and real become synonymous. The same can be said of the symbol 'Father', again, a symbol of power, and access to the Law. The performance reveals that it is the actual father who has this power - signifier and signified are conveniently aligned and the gap between them is dissolved.

Furthermore, by literalising within her spoken text the metaphors that circulate throughout and support psychoanalytical theory, Finley attempts to make them unpalatable. What is also evident is that such metaphors are not relegated merely to psychoanalytical discourse but have become commonplace in conversational language, although their roots could arguably be said to lie in Freudian theory. In Finley's text, then, normalised language such as 'mother fucker' is denaturalised and made strange by transforming the metaphorical into the literal. Just as she closes the gap between the signifier and signified, she reduces the space between the metaphorical and the literal, revealing the phallocentric grounds upon which psychoanalysis has constructed itself, and the associated phallocentricity that runs deep within society. Ironically, the unconscious everyday use of the language of psychoanalysis is revealed - and therefore made conscious - within this performance. In relation to this, Vivian M. Patraka suggests that:

> Perhaps one way to rupture the cycle of symbolic seduction between father and daughter that functions to uphold the phallic order is to go back to the literal, to perform as Finley does the shoddy, unerotic, painful quotidian horror that is covered over by the distractions of a monolithic taboo.[79]

In the performance, metaphors of repressed desire are vocally enacted. Such an enactment also explicitly stages the psychoanalytic theory of the 'desire' to return to a fullness associated with the non-differentiation between the infant and the mother's body (that is, prior to 'castration' or subjectification):

> My first sexual experience was at the time of my birth, passing through the vaginal canal. That red pulsing tunnel, that alley of love. I'm nothing but a human penis. And at the time of my birth I had an erection. I'm fucking my own mama at my birth. [...] I just take that mama and push her against that washer. And I take her baby, a bald-headed baby, and put Downy fabric softener on baby's head. Then I strap that baby around my waist till it's a baby dildo. Then I take that baby, that dildo, and fuck its own mama. 'Cause I'm nothing but a motherfucker. I'm nothing but a motherfucker. Just puttin' that baby back where it belongs. Back to its old room, the womb. (p. 66)

> My hands soothe her rumpled dimpled flesh. My mama! My mama, sweet mama. And I pull down her cotton Carters all pee stained. Elastic gone. Then I mount my own mama in the ass. That's right. I fuck my own mama in the ass. (p. 67)

Juxtaposed with this collapsing of the space between the signifier and the signified, however, there is also, paradoxically, an illumination of that space. Thus, the symbolic father' - the figure who imposes and upholds the 'Law' - in *TCSD*, *is* the 'real (imaginary) father' - the individual who bears the name father. Since the 'real father' has access to the phallic position, he becomes synonymous with the symbolic father. However, in spite of this, the symbolic father and the 'real father' are hugely at odds. Rather than upholding and maintaining the Law against incest, for example, the 'real father' is usually precisely the one who breaks this Law. Finley collapses the symbolic 'Father' and the 'Law-of-the-Father' into/onto the actual father and in that collapsing reveals the gap between the two: the 'real' cannot live up to the symbolic; that is, the symbolic position of the 'father' is occupied by the actual father, but is occupied inappropriately. What Finley shows, then, is the real abuse perpetrated by the one who

has access to the place of the symbolic - the symbolic place of power becomes an actual place of power. While the 'father' is never vocally present in the text, he is everywhere, the effects of his power searing through the spoken words:

> Like when my father told me he loved me after forty years then went into the bathroom, locked the door, put up pictures of children from the Sears catalog, arranged mirrors, black stockings and garters to look at while he masturbated as he hung himself from the shower stall. [...] And the reason why my father committed suicide is that he no longer found me attractive. (p. 60)

The 'father' also abuses his daughter with food:

> 'Showing me what it's like to be a mama', he says. 'Showing me what it's like to be a woman. To be loved. That's a daddy's job,' he tells me. (p. 68)

The 'father' refuses to allow his son to become the imaginary father: 'I just wanted that fatherly hug to a son turning to a man. No, you had to puke your gin, rye, and whiskey in the toilet bowl.' (p. 63) Finally, the 'father' refuses to accept a homosexual son or acknowledge his death. Within the 'properly' functioning symbolic order, a male cannot desire another male. To do so is to give up 'having' the phallus and wanting, instead, to 'be' the phallus, that is, feminine and passive. Beneath homophobia lies misogyny - to be figured as 'female' is to be positioned as a negative. In Finley's text, the homosexual is represented as non-human:

> And when I told you I had the disease that mostly afflicts homosexuals, women, and children too, I know you no longer considered me your son, a man, so I went to you as a human being. And all you could say was, 'I told you to stay away from those faggots, those fairies, those queers, those queens, those people with lisps. I told you to get out of San Francisco'. (pp. 68 - 69).

If you are not a 'man', you are not a human being. Thus, even though the 'father' is absent he remains central, omnipresent and oppressive. While Freud and Lacan may insist that the phallus is up for grabs, in culture, in the actual culture where women and

children live, men - those designated as 'real' men (and here the echo of 'you are not a real man' is evident) - more frequently have greater access to power.

Underneath such literalisation of psychoanalytical metaphors is the knowledge that such acts actually do occur - that women and children are sexually abused. While the abuser is more typically male, women also abuse children. Crucial to Finley's text is the line 'It's the father, it's the father, it's the father in all of us'. (p. 69) Since we are all marked by a lack, we are all propelled by a desire to fill up that lack - a desire to access the Other to make ourselves whole again. While women are mostly excluded from accessing power and authority, they will still desire that access. As Silverman states:

> It must be stressed once again that the desire of the mother, like that of the daughter or son, has its origins elsewhere, finds its inspiration and support in a symbolic field which is invested at all points with the desire for paternal authority. If she desires the phallus, and identifies it with the father, that is because she too finds herself subjected to the desire of the Other - to a cultural network which reifies the father by inserting his 'name' into a signifying chain in which it enjoys close proximity to other signifiers: 'law', 'money,' 'power,' 'knowledge,' 'plenitude,' 'authoritative vision,' etc.[80]

However, it still remains an acknowledged fact that men are more generally the abusers. What is apparent, then, is that in many cases, the so-called unconscious - constituted by repressed desires, and said to be structured like a language, therefore figured as metaphorical - is actually conscious and consciously enacted, shifting into the literal. By displaying these supposedly *repressed* desires, Finley, in the words of Pramaggiore:

> undermines one of the basic tenets of Freudian psychoanalysis - the positing of the unconscious as a realm cordoned off from the material and intersubjective world of patriarchal power relations.[81]

In *TOSI*, the male 'fantasies' seem all too real - because these 'fantasies' *are* frequently really enacted.

That such fantasies are not always unconscious fantasies is made all the more explicit by Finley's enactment of her 'own' female repressed fantasies, a display which

simultaneously reveals the operation of a double standard. One set of fantasies are so unfantastic because they actually happen. The other causes shock, even when it is only realised in language and not in fact. If the 'victims' of oppression should gain access to power, and if their so-called 'unconscious' fantasies became realised, became actually enacted, as the supposedly unconscious of some men are today, what would these fantasies be like? Finley perhaps gives us an idea:

> I go up to all the traders and cut off their balls. They don't bleed, only dollar signs come out. [...]
> So I gather all their balls, scrotum, testicles and stick 'em in my mouth. I roll 'em around my mouth and I feel like a squirrel in heat. I love the sound of scrotum. I take the balls home and boil them. 'Cause they're small balls and need to be plumped up. After I boil the balls I roll them in my own dung, my manure. [...]
> Ruenne. Ruenne sleeps with a gun under her pillow. For every time she has intercourse with her husband he defecates uncontrollably as he has orgasm. And the shit is running loose and splatters. Even though she put down Hefty trash bags over the carpeting and walls, lets the crap dry before pulling it off the plastic, she found the gun to do a better job. She puts that gun in her husband's asshole every time he is about to cum. The gun up his ass gives her such a sense of power. And for a few fleeting moments the tables are turned for her as she forgets the time when at gunpoint she was forced to perform fellatio in front of her children and pets in her own garage. (pp. 62.- 63)

Such literalisation seems horrific, grotesque, unacceptable, truly shocking. And this is exactly the point - if such literalised acts of the 'fantasy' of female power are unacceptable why should male abuse of power be, if not acceptable, then taken for granted?

In taking that 'power to abuse' and wielding it from a revenging body that is marked female - and therefore 'feminine,' passive, victim - Finley explicitly shows that such power is generally perceived to be 'masculine'. When a woman stages the abuse, it becomes more shocking, sickening, violent - even to those who call themselves feminists.[82] Within representation women are usually placed in positions under threat, or as victims of violence. Finley reverses this by putting men - in general, not just one,

specific man, which would serve to reduce this to a 'personal vendetta' or 'revenge story' - in a threatened position. In this act, then, she switches the spectatorial positions. As Z. Isiling Nataf comments:

> a woman being violent is still extremely taboo, and the blood-thirsty, castrating, frenzied, rageful woman is as monstrous and repressed in feminism as she is by the phallocracy. [...] Violence feeds into transgressive fantasies we don't always want to admit even to ourselves.[83]

Is part of the negative reaction by some feminists to Finley's performances evidence of this unwillingness to admit such fantasies (or even realities - women do occasionally take revenge in the real, as evidenced by the 'Bobbit' case)?

While Finley may restage abuse across her body, that same body refuses to be a passive victim. Instead, it is a material body, an enraged body that directly confronts the spectator in its visceral presentness. Thus, the abjected body of 'woman' stands beside the enraged body of Finley, and we see them both in a sort of double vision. Or, as Alisa Solomon writes, in relation to women performers:

> On stage, [...] 'woman' may be *re*presented, but at the same time a living, breathing woman can be *pre*sented. And most important, it's possible for her to comment on the character or image she represents, that is, to make those quotation marks around 'woman' visible.[84]

Again, then, as Solomon indicates, the gap between the signifier and the signified is foregrounded. Finley reveals the quotation marks around 'woman' by showing the way in which she has been constructed within psychoanalytic discourse while also playing 'woman' differently. In the very first section of the performance Finley explicates the male/female binary and its role in maintaining the system of patriarchy and heterosexuality:

> But she knew that it really wasn't the doctors' fault. That the problem really was in the way she projected her femininity. And if she wasn't passive, well she just

> didn't feel desirable. And if she wasn't desirable, she didn't feel female. And if she wasn't female, well, the whole world would cave in. (p. 60)

Patriarchal culture relies on the positioning of the female as the negative term in the male/female binary, which also produces other binary positions, such as her lack to his whole, passive to his active, object to his subject. If she does not fulfil these roles, then, indeed, the whole world may cave in, for without 'woman' there can be no 'man'. And woman can only be 'woman' within this economy if she is passive, and desirable (to man). As Dolan recognises, Finley shifts

> the typical balance of power. Her aggressive denial of the power dynamics of legitimate sexuality - that is, heterosexuality, in which men are powerful and women are passive - angers male spectators.[85]

Furthermore, through an active, excessive rendering of abuse staged across her body, she literally makes it undesirable. (And, if woman is undesirable...) By offering her body as already consumed Finley discourages any spectatorial desire of that body. The body of Finley (and those who 'inhabit' her) vomits, bleeds, defecates (although not literally). Finley also uses bizarre, not neatly explainable or easily associated materials to physically alter her body. This is not the cleaned up, fantasy body of pornography, but the body of the living flesh, the abject body.[86] A stage direction, for example, reads:

> Easter baskets and stuffed animals sit on table. Take off clothes. Put colored unboiled eggs from basket and animals in one large clear-plastic bag. Smash contents till contents are yellow. Put mixture on body using soaked animals as applicators. Sprinkle glitter and confetti on body and wrap self in paper garlands as boas. (p. 60)

Though Finley operates *within* the discursive system of psychoanalysis, she continues to enact a resistance to it by showing the real power that such discourse has on materially located bodies and then staging a reversal of that power. In *TOSD*, desire to fill up the hole left by lack becomes staged to excess - so that everything is literally taken

into the body in a show of consumption. Such consumption, however, is re-enacted on or returned violently to those bodies that use their consumption as a symbol of authority:

> So I open up those designer jeans of yours. Open up your ass and stick up there sushi, nouvelle cuisine. I stick up your ass Cuisinarts, white wine, and racquetball, your cordless phone and Walkman up your ass. And you look at me worried and ask 'but where's the graffiti art' and I say 'up your ass.' (p. 62)

As is shown in this extract, Finley links desire and capitalist production/consumption closely throughout the performance, with consumption staged as the desire to fill up lack. In the capitalist world, individual satisfaction reigns supreme - it is 'every man for himself'.(p. 70)

Finley does not provide us with a 'cure' for our social ills, or see some rosy future in the distance if only we could all change in various ways. She does not suggest an alternative discourse to psychoanalysis. Instead, she shows us the 'real' world. A recurring word within the performance is 'feel', and I would suggest that this is what Finley is attempting: to make us feel something, to shake us out of our complacency at accepting the status quo as just the way things are. Through her performance she is carrying out her own personal petitioning, rioting, terrorising and organising (p. 61) to make us feel the horror of the world we have come to accept. Finley says that she wants the audience:

> to feel that I am really feeling it. Maybe not even my words, but just that energy. I'm giving everything I have to make it an experience. You can't pick that up on film or on disks. It's the live experience, and that's really important.[87]

Furthermore, the voices in her performance variously state:

> And the only feelings I share are no feelings at all. Just no feelings at all. The only feelings I share are no feelings at all. (p. 64)
>
> 'Cause the only feelings I show are NO feelings at all, girl. Just no feelings at all. (p. 68)

> It's better to feel abuse than to feel nothing at all. It's better to feel abuse than to feel nothing at all. (p. 69)

Another repeated phrase is 'Something is going to happen' (p. 61) and:

> But something's gotta give.
> Something's gotta give.
> Something's gonna happen. (p. 70)

Refusing to close down her performance with simple answers, she merely reveals the oppression and violence that the present system wreaks, attempting to make us *feel* its impact on our bodies, and in that provocative act, perhaps hopes to make us *move* - to *act*, rather than to accept. For Finley, good art is 'that which destroys the last generation's hopes'.[88] At the end of Finley's performance text there is not much hope. Leaving us standing in the ruins, she gives us the responsibility of finding a way out of the detritus of Western capitalism and the constant state of desire that is said to structure every subjectivity, placing consumption and the needs of the individual before anything else. If psychoanalysis is defended by feminists as being 'descriptive' rather than 'discursively constructive' of gender differences and social relations, Finley offers her own description and it is one that is much harder to swallow. In showing us the show, she seems to be asking how much more we need to see before we do something. Analysis is not enough.

> I'm your voyeur. I'm your exhibitionist. I'm your pervert, your fool, your martyr, your fool. I'm your Donald Trump, your Baby M. I'm your real estate, your profits, your greed.
> But something's gotta give.
> Something's gotta give.
> Something's gonna happen. (p. 70)

RONA LEE - *AVID METAMORPHOSIS 1* (1995)[89]

In Finley's performance words are rendered literal, impacting the material flesh of bodies. In contrast to this, in Rona Lee's *Avid Metamorphosis 1*, one of a series of three works, there are no spoken words and the body marked 'female' is actively metamorphosed, rendering it strange. The following reading is heavily indebted to Peggy Phelan's text *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*.

I enter into the space - an upstairs gallery, with varnished wooden floors, grey walls and bare windows. Immediately in front of me I see a woman in a long, black dress, standing behind a table, working intently on the piece of cloth lying on it. I look again. A purple scarf is covering the lower half of her face, and a white beak is attached to this scarf. Her arms are covered in elbow length purple gloves. On the floor, laid out carefully in separate sections, are pieces of cloth. The 'woman' (is she? isn't she?) working on the cloth is not sewing but unpicking it. In front of her is a mirror, angled slightly. Positioned above the 'woman' is a small video camera.

Suspended from a high bar, behind her, there are two coat hangers. On one is a grey jacket out of which a hole has been cut in the centre. Contained in this hole is a monitor, which plays the image caught by the camera. The captured image is of hands holding a small pair of scissors that are unpicking seams. A look again at the 'woman' reveals that she is unpicking the stitching of a man's grey suit. The other hanger holds a number of white shirts, ascending in size, from a very small infant size to an adult size. Each shirt is stuck onto a larger one, and in the centre of them is a hole which runs through them all - this time framed by purple material.

Each time the 'woman' has finished unpicking the stitches of a particular piece of the suit, she takes the loosened material and places it on the floor, in an organised and careful fashion. So far she has removed shoulder lining, pockets, buttons, and the inside

of the jacket. The unpicking of the stitches is unhurried and methodical, the same action repeated again and again. The 'woman' also repeatedly looks into the mirror which is reflecting the monitor behind her, to see her hands doing the work.

Walking in on a 'woman' with a beak doing what would appear to be a private task, assumed at first to be assembling something, but then revealed to be disassembling something. Entering the private space of the woman locked in the turret, watching her execute a riddle, an arduous task, a punishment, a penance, a duty? I cannot decide. Watching the concentration, the focus, the single-mindedness, the perseverance. Watching her looking at the mirror, never at me or at any of the others who are watching her. We see her but she does not see us, because she never looks. Where should I look? At the monitor or at her? Watching her and trying to work out exactly what are the parameters of this, her private space. Where does the performance space end? The spectator space begin? Where should I stand to see (clearly)? Like most in the room I stand as far away as possible from her, scared of interrupting her painstakingly careful work, pushing myself into the wall facing her as much as I am able, not wanting to attract attention to myself, wanting to make myself invisible yet still wanting to watch. Watching her unpicking, and unpicking, and unpicking, mesmerised by the repetition. Hypnotised by the careful actions, like watching a watch swing back and forth. Switching my focus from her to the screen in an attempt to see both.

Others are more bold, sitting cross-legged on the floor nearer her. Some even walk around the space looking at the sections of cloth laid out on the ground. It seems to me a brave violation. But still she refuses to see those who stand close. Resolute in her private task we remain unacknowledged. How long has she been doing this? She was here before my arrival. I watch and watch and she unpicks, unpicks. Ceaseless movement. When I leave will she keep going? When she is alone in the space will her

work continue? Although we are given permission to be here, that permission is framed by time. We can enter at the start of that time, the appointed hour, but already, by the time we arrive, she is unpicking. Similarly, we can stay until the 'end', but when will that be? When will she stop? Lee does not appear to obey the conventions of time, the conventions of performance and spectator time. I know that she will stop sometime, but I also know that I will not be here to witness it, that it will not be in my time. In my mind's eye, then, she will be doing this forever. (She is still doing it as I write this.) There is no closure. No final 'unpick'. No resolution. Her task is an endless one. The durational aspect of this installation performance allows a sense of the never-ending, of the necessity of repetition, of a woman's work never done.[90] Time, here, is not segmented. It flows. No beginning, middle or end; no linearity or teleology but merely continuation in which one moment, one movement, becomes inseparable, indistinguishable, from another. And yet the increasingly disassembled suit bears testimony to the fact that time *has* passed, even though the movements remain always the same. What 'time' does the performer inhabit? A time when nothing changes? A time to keep going, to not give in? A hope for a better time?

The refusal of an ending, of a conclusion, of a climax, leaves me unable to take the performance away, and I am left carrying what I assume is only a fragment. Perhaps like a memory. Which would seem appropriate since the recognition of time passing can only be contemplated as memory. And the memory that I carry is 'unpick, unpick, unpick'.

The beak covers her mouth, stopping her from talking, should she wish to. Yet it also functions to lift her out of the 'normal' - this is not a 'woman' but a bird, a creature, a mythical being. Why is she undertaking this arduous task? A labour of love? Carefully executed. And yet she is not making something but is destroying something.

Unhurriedly. The grey suit is being unpicked stitch by stitch until it is no longer a suit but an assortment of unconnected parts, unable to function as a whole. Readings proliferate in my mind. Unpicking the myths. Revealing the seams. Reversing the fairytale. Taking revenge. I cannot decide.

The silence. The repetitive actions. The beak. The colours. The fragmented suit. A strange space. More like a dream than reality. 'She' is there, in front of me, but who is she? What is she? What is she doing?

Rona Lee's performance is unsettling (and productive) because I cannot decide, definitively, what it is that I see. I can 'see' Rona Lee, but cannot 'see' her because she looks both familiar and unfamiliar, a woman and yet not a woman, with her face half covered in a scarf and her mouth covered in a beak. Her actions, small and repetitive, her unbroken silence, offer no help, no declaration.

I cannot 'see' anyone else in the performance and yet the suit she is unpicking, the suit that hangs above her to one side, and the shirts that hang on the other suggest the presence of one that is not visibly here - again, as in Finley's performance, the absent male. He may be 'physically' absent, but his presence is nevertheless registered in every way throughout the space - she holds his presence in her hands, his presence looks over her, surveilling her actions, playing them back to her. There is something to be said, then, about the 'power' of the invisible. He is *not* here, and yet he is everywhere.

It is this paradox of 'seeing' that is central to and revealed in Lee's performance, a paradox accurately summed up by Schneider who states that 'Women are invisible to the degree that they are visible - that is, as visible, women will be read relative to man, while man is also read relative to man.'[91] Within the system of representation, women are unable to signify 'real women' because the purpose of 'woman' is to reflect back to 'man' both his desire and his position as 'man' in relation to her 'not-man'. She is 'his'

cipher, and as such 'she' is not there. While identity is dependent on the seeing of this 'other', for it is the other that marks the separation between one and the other and the other that reflects back the image of the self, Phelan notes that:

> The proposition that one sees oneself in terms of the other and the other in terms of oneself, is itself differently marked according for men and women. When the unmarked woman looks at the marked man she sees a man; but she sees herself as other, as negative-man. Within the frame of the phallic mark, she sees that which she is not.[92]

Woman is unable to see that which she is. For some performance artists, the political task is to reveal that which is invisible which, as already stated, is something of an impossible task. Rona Lee, however, deliberately defamiliarises the body of woman, making 'her' disappear.

This strategy of 'active disappearance' recognises the danger that is implicit when women attempt to (re)present 'woman'. The attempt to make woman more visible risks subjecting that body 'to legal, artistic, and psychic surveillance. This, in turn, reinforces the idea that she *is* her body'.[93] More representations of women do not necessarily make woman any more 'real'. They merely reveal 'woman' to be a construction. Moreover, such (re)presentations will be re-marked by 'he' who seeks to see himself, returning female (re)presentations into the always already marked other, as fetishes or the abject.

Within Lee's performance, the 'woman' cannot see 'herself'. What she sees instead is an image that is contained within the figure of the 'male'. The camera positioned above her records the movements of her hands, and these are shown in the monitor which inhabits the centre of the suit. The suit is the symbol of the absent yet always already present male. When the woman looks in the mirror, she does not see a direct reflection of 'woman' but sees, instead, the reflection of that which he sees, and that which he sees is contained within him and not her. Her internal self is figured in an

image of his internal self. And his internal self is reliant on containing 'her' image. Without her, he cannot position himself as 'male'. This image is contained *within* him, rather than being held as distinct, as different. However, when she looks in the mirror, she does not see herself containing 'him', and reducing 'him' to the Same, because the Same is always male, and woman is always other, on which he depends for his subjectivity. She sees only what he sees, and her image of herself is a reflection of his image of her. And that which he sees is only one part of her - her gloved hands. Her 'whole' body has been reduced to a part. She has been made into a fetish - a phallic substitute. From the position of the 'male', however, when he looks in the mirror he sees himself, propped up by the marks he has made on 'woman' as the non-male. (In the performance, the suit jacket is further back from the mirror, and thus the 'person' wearing the jacket will see more.) What the 'woman' sees in the mirror is a copy of the copy that the 'male' eye/camera has seen. In this sense, Lee enacts a literal rendition of Phelan's assertion that:

> A re-presented woman is always a copy of a copy; the 'real' (of) woman cannot be represented because her function is to re-present man. She is the mirror and thus is never in it. Her narrowly defined but ubiquitous image represents the frenzy of man to see she who makes him him.[94]

Thus, Lee shows the show of seeing - how it is that we see, and the different positions that genders are made to occupy - to see or be seen, marked or unmarked.

> However, within the 'male' imaging of the woman, Lee inserts a resistance. First, the hands are holding scissors - within this there is an implicit threat. Scissors cut - cut off, cut out. In one way, this could be read as the 'male' incorporating - or reinscribing - the fear of castration, which women are made to symbolise. The other side of the coin, however, is that Lee is literalising the castrating female figure, taking on that metaphor and bringing it into the real. And the 'castration' is not of the 'penis', but is a

picking away at the inside of 'man', stripping him of his self-assured subjectivity. Furthermore, what the male 'eye'/camera does not record is the task that the woman is executing in the 'real' of the performance. It is only when one looks away from the suited monitor that one can see that she is undertaking a task of destruction - she is unpicking the suit, a copy of the symbolic suit that hangs behind her, revealing its seams, revealing the way it is held together, sutured by stitching. 'She' who makes him (mean) is *unmaking* him. There is also an implicit association between the beak of the woman, and the scissors that she is using. The beak enacts a substitution for the scissors, collapsing the two objects into the one action - the bird-woman unpicks the suit/system. The table covered in a white cloth signifies an operating table, the suit doubly signifying the 'male' and the 'system of representation': the male/system is being operated on, taken apart, disassembled. Thus, while the 'male' of the hanging suit may contain and constrain the 'woman', the 'woman' before me (and the 'woman' captured in the monitor image) is actually defiantly resisting this, by literally destroying the system that would position her as his image (maker). The unpicking of the system that positions her as not-man, as invisible on any other terms, is mirrored in the unpicking of the suit. If 'he' uses 'her' to fill up his hole and make him whole, then she is (in) his seams. Unpick (her from) the seams and the unified, 'whole' image collapses.

If the signifier 'man' and its metonym 'suit' is unpicked, what happens to 'woman'? If 'woman' is freed from the system of representation will she then be able to 'see' herself? If the mirror is angled differently, that which she sees would not be wholly recognisable. It would be a woman with a 'beak'? Which is precisely what I see here, in this space. It is an image that offers a proliferation of readings and cannot therefore be fixed or easily contained.[95] If, as Phelan asserts, 'What we can see is in every way related to what one can say',[96] I do not know how to say what is before me, as the words

available are inadequate to the vision. 'She' is not/does not exist in the 'real'. I do not, then, *know* what I see. And if I do not know what I see, I similarly do not know how to position myself in relation to it. In this sense, Lee is disrupting the usual positioning of the spectator, denying me a position from which to project, identify or objectify. While Lee offers herself as an object to be seen, there is no referent in the 'real' enabling me to 'see' her, to make her mean.

This is not to deny that Lee bears *some* relation to what I usually 'see' of woman since I still read her as a woman with a beak. But this beak also makes her not a 'woman'. She both is and is not a woman. And perhaps this also implicitly suggests that what I usually 'see' of woman both is and is not woman, since 'woman', though materially present, is no more 'real' than the image that Lee is presenting me with here.

Phelan has suggested that in order to 'see' differently, we must acknowledge the inability to fully 'see' ourselves, because only then will the other be other-than a cipher for self-seeing, and only then will be able to resist turning the other into the Same.

> The failure of the inward gaze to produce self-seeing needs to be acknowledged. If one could confront the internal/external other as always already lost one would not have to rely so heavily on the image of the external other to produce what the looker lacks. [...] Until one can accept one's internal other as lost, invisible, an unmarked blank to oneself and within the world, the external other will always bear the marks and scars of the looker's deadening gaze.[97]

The white shirts, symbolic of the progression of the infant to the adult male, are representative of this unmarked blank. They have a hole in the middle, and within that hole there is no already inscribed 'image' of the external 'other' made into the Same. Instead, there is a hole that emanates only a colour. However, this colour is purple, and matches the colour of the performer's gloves and scarf. The hole, then, could be said to carry traces of the other, without fully imaging or fixing that other. When the suit is unpicked one imagines that the shirt below is revealed. When the system of

representation is unpicked, when the other that is bound to the subject to enable it to maintain a self-identity falls away, that which is beneath is seen to be not 'full'. not 'unified'. The internal gaze is acknowledged as being partial. Our ability at self-sight is 'seen' to be impossible. For Phelan:

> By declaring our eyes blind and impotent we may be able to resist the smooth reproduction of the self-same. We may begin to be able to inhabit the blank without forcing the other to fill it.[98]

CHAPTER 6
WHO'S WHO? A GUIDE TO SEXUAL POSITION(ING)S

What sense does it make to extend representation to subjects who are constructed through the exclusion of those who fail to conform to unspoken normative requirements of the subject?

Judith Butler[1]

THREE MEMORIES (1991 - 1995)

My boyfriend's mother, after meeting me for the first time, tells him I'm nice but I could 'make more of myself'.

My girlfriend's getting married to Edward this morning. We wake up and drink champagne. She slips into her white wedding dress, complete with long white gloves, while I get into my blue velvet dress. Just before the guests arrive she removes one of her long white gloves and fucks me against the kitchen sink. One in the eye for immigration control.

Leaving the ICA bathroom, after having seen one of the show's in the Jezebel Season ('A season of international performances reflecting the diversity of artforms and gender agendas being embraced by the iconoclastic, subversive and innovative women artists working in the 90s'),[2] I almost collide into another woman entering the bathroom. 'Excuse me', she says, followed by 'Oh, I thought this was the ladies'.

IT'S THE LESBIAN IN US...(?)

In this Chapter I wish to look at two performances - Victoria Goodwin Baker's *Dyke 'um Fag* (1994)[3] and Anita Loomis' *Female Deviations: Autobiographies of Desire* (1996).[4] Immediately I am faced with a problem - where to position these pieces in relation to my thesis? My unease at locating them as 'Lesbian' is marked by the (compulsory?) attendant marks of '' - marks in writing which signal that, like the category 'woman', sexual identities have been equally problematised in recent theoretical writings.

One implicit danger in signalling that this chapter is a chapter on 'lesbian performance' is that such labelling presumes that we know in advance who such a person (or what such a practice) is, that 'the lesbian' is a discrete and identifiable category.[5] Within the realm of performance or any other cultural production, questions circulate around the difficulty of defining a 'lesbian' text - is it the lesbianism of the author (presuming we know this), the lesbian content of the text, or something more ephemeral known as a 'lesbian sensibility'?[6]

Furthermore, this approach of defining 'the lesbian' rests on the assumption that the 'lesbian' is visible - that you know one when you see one. This begs two further questions: is seeing believing, and is what we see all there is? As Lynda Hart has remarked, unlike other 'identity categories' sexuality is not marked visibly on the surface of the body:

> Whereas political essentialisms of race and gender may resort to color or sex to ground their strategies (not, of course, without their attendant risks), sexual identities would seem to rely not on some presumably visible difference, but, instead, on acts that cannot be marked.[7]

This situation of the 'invisibility' of lesbians has resulted in the call from some quarters to make lesbians more visible within society through representational strategies.

However, returning to the issues that Peggy Phelan raises in relation to visibility politics it is perhaps not wholly positive or beneficial to 'make' lesbians 'visible'. Moreover, if 'lesbian' is a position constructed through a necessary exclusion from heterosexuality, what or who is it that we are making visible or representing? As Elizabeth Grosz suggests, to 'know' lesbian desire risks the danger of the tying 'of the new to models of what is already known, the production of endless repetition, endless variations of the same'.[8]

If one intersects Grosz's anxieties with a deconstructive practice, then perhaps a more fruitful way of exploring lesbian sexuality would be to leave it as undecidable - open to continual change and contestation. Indeed, this strategy of undecidability would appear to be upheld by the recent history of the intersection of feminist politics with lesbian politics. In the 1970s and early 1980s lesbians joined the feminist movement under the common banner of gender, and, in some instances, lesbianism was heralded as a positive political choice for feminists - a personal practice which could potentially escape the operations of an oppressive patriarchy. As early as 1973, the Radicalesbians described the lesbian as 'a woman-identified woman' who 'acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being', unwilling to 'accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society - the female role'.[9] However, while this may have been one strategy of including the 'lesbian figure' within the feminist movement (feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice), it did not succeed in the smooth inclusion of the former into the latter.[10] Hardly surprisingly, the presence of lesbians within the movement was used by sections of the larger society (notably the media system) to discredit it, labelling its participants as 'men-haters', a backlash which prompted 'feminist guru' Betty Friedan to denounce the 'lavender menace', stating that their presence would 'harm the overall feminist cause'.[11]

A further tension within the lesbian feminist movement is the tendency of feminists to subsume lesbianism under its rubric of gender difference - that is, because lesbians are women then the areas of concern for feminists will apply equally to lesbians.[12] In these instances, lesbians are seen as a 'variation' in general feminist writings, as a subcategory within feminism. The separation of gender and sexuality, however, is not a simple matter. Monique Wittig would assert - with, I would argue, good cause - that 'lesbians are not women' because 'what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation' - a relation that, in Wittig's view, lesbians are outside of and exempt from.[13] (Wittig makes no reference to the female who is neither lesbian nor heterosexual - that is the celibate woman, the bisexual or the autonomously sexual woman - these 'others' then are Wittig's constitutive outside.) One major problem with Wittig's theory is that it erases the material body of the lesbian - for, while in terms of language 'lesbian' may be outwith the symbolic system and not part of a system of exchange, their bodies are still read as gendered feminine (or, as I shall go on to explicate, masculine).[14] While they may 'be' lesbians, they are also most frequently perceived as 'women' and are therefore impacted by some of the same forces that affect heterosexual women living in a patriarchal or sexist society. As Hilary Harris concisely puts it, 'Sexuality may be about fucking, but getting fucked is still about gender, even if 'only' metaphorically.'[15] Performance artist Holly Hughes similarly states that, in relation to the reality of sexism and sexual violence, 'Lesbians can't stop being women and dealing with that reality.'[16]

The other side of this coin, however, is that too narrow a focus on gender difference marginalises lesbian experience, making it invisible or supplementary, rather than something distinct from the problems of gender oppression. As Gayle Rubin

forcefully suggests, 'lesbians are also oppressed as queers and perverts, by the operation of sexual, not gender stratification.'[17]

Another area of unease that exists between the feminist movement and lesbians, resulting in heated debate, is that of lesbian sexual practice. Ironically, in respect of the Radicalesbians' earlier statement, many lesbians were excluded - or felt excluded - from the (lesbian) feminist movement because their sexual practice (including penetration, using sex toys and pornography), was regarded as 'male identified'.[18] Wilton indicates that 'Detached from gender, "heterosexual" now meant any sex which involved any kind of inequality between partners'.[19] In many ways, this reaction towards lesbian sexual practice was predictable, in that 'lesbian relationships' within the feminist movement had been perceived as being the escape route from patriarchally organised relationships, and concentration was therefore placed on the 'caring, sharing, nurturing' aspects of the 'woman-identified-woman' rather than on the sexually active lesbian relationship. As Jill Dolan points out, 'the 1970s and 1980s lesbianism's too rigid attachment to identity politics of gender by terms such as 'woman-identification' re-closeted active sexual practice.'[20] Adrienne Rich's 'lesbian continuum' (presented in 1981) is a prime example of this tendency to make lesbian sexual practice and desire invisible.[21]

These debates over 'proper' lesbian sexual activity continue to the present day, as evidenced by the vigorous disagreements about lesbian S/M practice which some lesbians, lesbian feminists and heterosexual feminists perceive as being implicated in, and constitutive of, patriarchal power relations. Lorena Leigh Saxe argues, for example, that sado-masochism is based on a disrespect and contempt for women, and is a practice that eroticises power without actively contributing to the dismantling of 'real' power relations that exist in society.[22] The paradox of a feminist movement circumscribing what is 'acceptable' is neatly caught by Joan Nestle, who writes:

> One of the most deeply held opinions in feminism is that women should be autonomous and self-directed in defining their sexual desire, yet when a woman says 'This is my desire' feminists rush in to say, 'no, no, it is the prick in your head; women should not desire that act.'[23]

The fissures that appeared in the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s continue to cause unease today, both within the wider feminist movement and within the lesbian and gay community itself, circulating around the question of who 'properly' belongs to that community. Like the feminist movement, the lesbian and gay community has suffered fractions and splits, as differences come to the fore and are frequently unacknowledged, assimilated or excluded. Such divisions have acted as the catalyst for scrutinising the concept of 'community'. As David Woohhead notes, the results of creating a 'community' are ambivalent since although it acts as a 'site of resistance [...], a site of shared injustice, a symbolic representation [...]' it is also a system of 'exclusivity'.[24]

Thus, although 'the community' does serve political purposes, the politics upon which it is grounded insist upon the internal/external boundary, transforming or disregarding differences in the process. As Benedict Anderson has suggested in relation to nations figured as imagined political communities, they are *imagined*:

> because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [...I]t is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.[25]

Meanwhile, those who are expelled from or refused entry into 'the community' form its essential borders, with 'the community' actively policing the borders to ensure they are maintained. In the final paragraph of her 'semi-autobiographical' novel, *Stone Butch Blues*, Leslie Feinberg poignantly captures this moment of exclusion as it affects her:

> I watch protests and rallies from across the street. And part of me feels so connected to you all, but I don't know if I'm welcome to join. There's lots of us who are on the outside and we don't want to be. We're getting busted and beated up. We're dying out here. We need you - but you need us, too. I don't know what it would take to really change the world. But couldn't we get together and try to figure it out? Couldn't the *we* be bigger? Isn't there a way we could help fight each other's battles so that we're not always alone?[26]

Feinberg is calling for a model of coalition politics here, where what is required is not a community based on 'unity' or 'sameness', but a movement that recognises the myriad of differences that are presently not captured or included by the phrase 'lesbian and gay community,' but are equally outwith the heterosexual matrix (and by this I mean a discursive matrix, as the notion of a unified, homogeneous 'heterosexuality' has itself been problematised).[27] Feinberg, a butch lesbian who underwent some of the prescribed treatments/operations for becoming a FTM transsexual troubles identity categories and community boundaries, fitting nowhere comfortably. This position is mirrored by performer Kate Bornstein, categorised as a MTF transsexual, but self-identified as neither male nor female:

> my existence within a lesbian and gay community is threatening to the very foundations of that community. Here I am: I am saying that I'm not a man and I'm not a woman. So what happens when a lesbian is attracted to me? I call into question her lesbian identity.[28]
>
> It is precisely because such people fall outwith the 'lesbian and gay community'

that Judith Butler asks whether demanding such unity actually produces further fragmentation. She suggests instead that:

> Certain forms of acknowledged fragmentation might facilitate coalitional action precisely because the 'unity' of the category [...] is neither presumed nor desired. Does 'unity' set up an exclusionary norm of solidarity at the level of identity that rules out the possibility of a set of actions which disrupt the very borders of identity concepts, or which seek to accomplish precisely that disruption as an explicit political aim?[29]

Both heterocentrist psychoanalytical and common-sensical notions of sexual identity align sex, gender and sexuality, organising them into a normative heterosexual framework (structured through complementary opposites). Thus biological sex man = masculine gender = male heterosexual complements biological sex woman = feminine gender = female heterosexual. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick provides a useful list of 'identity characteristics' which indicates that while sexual identity may be assumed to be unitary, it is actually constituted by various elements which include:

> your biological (e.g., chromosomal) sex, male or female;
> your self-perceived gender assignment, male or female (supposed to be the same as your biological sex);
> the preponderance of your traits of personality and appearance, masculine or feminine (supposed to correspond to your sex and gender);
> the biological sex of your preferred partner;
> the gender assignment of your preferred partner (supposed to be the same as her/his biological sex);
> the masculinity or femininity of your preferred partner (supposed to be the opposite of your own);
> your self-perception as gay or straight (supposed to correspond to whether your preferred partner is your sex or the opposite);
> your preferred partner's self-perception as gay or straight (supposed to be the same as yours);
> your procreative choice (supposed to be insertive if your are male or masculine, receptive if your are female or feminine);
> your most eroticized sexual organs (supposed to correspond to the procreative capabilities of your sex, and to your insertive/receptive assignment); [...]
> your enjoyment of power in sexual relations (supposed to be low if you are female or feminine, high if male or masculine); [....][30]

As Sedgwick goes on to state, it is presumed possible to determine from a person's biological sex alone any number of other traits - providing that a parenthesis is added to stipulate that the biological sex of your preferred partner will be the opposite of one's own. Even without this heteronormative assumption, however, 'what's striking is the number and *difference* of the dimensions that "sexual identity" is supposed to organise into a seamless and univocal whole.'[31] Such a perception of sexual identity casts it as fixed and stable, denying the various ways in which these specifications can be mis-

aligned from the normative notion - thus, someone can have a physically 'male' body but perceive their gender to be feminine, women can act 'masculinely' by becoming the insertive member of the couple, men can act 'femininely' by being sexually reactive, both members of a couple can have the same gender or the same biological sex, or different 'genders' but the same biological sex, or the same genders and different biological sexes, or people's genders can fluctuate, or people may not just be sexually active in pairs, or they may be sexually active autonomously, or they may not be sexually active at all.

The problem with such normative conceptions of sexual identity, therefore, is that they assume sexuality can be neatly defined, thus serving to smooth over the multiple disruptions that exist within sexual identities; this is as true of a conception of lesbian identity which stresses a 'woman-centred' relationship as a conception of heterosexuality which perceives the man as always active and the woman as always passive. It also assumes that sexual identity is static and never-changing. Therefore, a person is either heterosexual or homosexual - which does not account for bisexuality, or for people who have same-sex sex but who identify as heterosexual, or for lesbians who sleep with men yet continue to identify as lesbians. Sexual identity and self-conceptions of sexual identity are far more fluid than the culturally produced understanding of it would suggest, as is exemplified by the following advert which appeared in a San Francisco paper:

> Looking for Daddy. This handsome fag boy needs a daddy: a strong, tough, loving daddy with a sharp knife and a big dick. Let me serve you, and let me show you what a pig I can be, with proper discipline. Experienced daddies only. Dykes, FTMs, and gay men in the Bay Area all welcome. My boy pussy awaits you.[32]

In this advert binary distinctions are severely troubled, most notably those of gender and sexuality. Corollary binaries, such as passive/active are also troubled, and, with the

inclusion of FTMs and the fact that anyone can 'possess' a 'dick', nature/culture is also problematised.

The politics of this fluidity of 'identity' should not go unrecognised. To establish 'lesbianism' only in opposition to heterosexuality actually serves to resolidify heterosexuality into some kind of unified whole. At the same time, it unifies 'lesbianism' into a single knowable activity and the 'lesbian' into a single knowable subject, thus erasing the differences between lesbians and within lesbian sexual practice.[33]

This is not to deny that in terms of political praxis it may be necessary at times to gather under a 'lesbian banner' in what Gayatri Spivak terms 'strategic essentialism',[34] with the proviso that one considers carefully who the potential beneficiaries (and victims) of such a strategy are. Alternatively, operating within a more fluid significatory field, Judith Butler asserts that she will 'appear at political occasions under the sign of lesbian', but that she would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that means.[35]

Echoing Elam's desire not to close down the 'meaning' of woman, before we can fully know what she means, or has meant, Butler admits that:

> There is a political necessity to use some signs now, and we do, but how to use it in such a way that its futural significations are not *foreclosed*? How to use the sign and avow its temporal contingency at once?[36]

This issue returns us once again to the notion of a 'coalitional' politics which is open to continual renegotiation and cross-subjective alliances, and whose boundaries remain contested, rather than closed (who gets to draw the boundaries, where, for what purpose, at whose/what cost?)

It is impossible to maintain coherent boundaries around sexuality because there is nothing natural or essential about sexual identity (just as there is nothing natural about gender or the sexed body, as I have tried to show in previous chapters). As Diana Fuss

warns 'It is pointless to investigate the root causes of homosexuality' because it is 'not a transhistorical, transcultural, eternal category but a socially contingent and variant construction'.[37] And, as Foucault has taught, the homosexual, as an identifiable category of person, did not exist prior to the nineteenth century and only came into existence as a means of promoting and protecting the notion (or social fiction) of 'the heterosexual' as another specific category of person to be brought within a controlling regime of power.

For Foucault, sexuality is itself a historical construct:

> not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.[38]

With respect to this understanding of the constitution of sexuality, it would be impossible to posit homosexuality as completely outside of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality demands homosexuality as its 'outside' but this outside is, therefore, necessarily inside - and even if it is located on the borders, borders still touch one another.[39] As Grosz notes, 'power requires the structural positions of subordination, not as the outside or limit of its effectivity, but as its internal condition, the "hinge" on which it pivots.'[40] For this reason, Shane Phelan suggests that we should not search for the 'truth' of sexuality (because there is not one), but should interrogate instead the institution of heterosexuality, since such interrogation will 'usefully shift the focus from lesbian identity [thus] avoiding the constructions of lesbianism that trap us; constructions based on the idea of a natural, or an authentic lesbian identity, by which we can measure and justify our existence'.[41]

It is little wonder that, in respect of all that I have written so far, I am edging away from my desire to place these performances within a 'lesbian' rubric, and moving

towards relocating them as 'queer'. 'This handsome fag boy' cited above is surely referenced by Sedgwick's notion of 'queer':

> the openmesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, or anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically.[42]

'Queer' is, in a sense, a doubled strategy of intervention. 'Queer theory' denotes a poststructuralist engagement with discourses circulating around sexuality, attempting to destabilise the binary that organises sexual identity into heterosexuality/homosexuality. The aim is as much to problematise heterosexuality as it is homosexuality. The desire, then, is not to explain or describe 'homosexuality', but to trouble the mechanisms that would posit sexuality as stable, coherent and unified, through troubling and rejecting other oppositionally aligned categories (man vs woman, heterosexual vs homosexual), identity categories (man, woman, black, white), and asssumptive equations (sex = gender). As Clough asserts 'queer theory shifts the focus of a lesbian feminist criticism and of feminist theorising generally from an epistemology of experience to the exploration of the practices of disciplining knowledge [...]'.[43] There is no essential or innate sexual identity at the centre of queer theory because, after Butler, sexual subjectivity is performative - even the heterosexual matrix is the result of repetitive and stylised acts which serve to 'mark' and materialise the body as heterosexual, produced within the discourse of heterosexuality.[44] It is precisely because 'queer' moves away from any notion of the 'normal' (of either heterosexual or homosexual practices) that it has proven to be enticing to many who feel marginalised, policed, or discredited by the 'lesbian and gay community' (such as S/M dykes, FTMs, or lesbians who sleep with men).

Existing alongside this theory is 'queer practice' (although 'queer theory' *is* also 'queer practice') with people deliberately enacting a literal troubling of the binaries problematised within queer theory. As Sedgwick states:

> 'gay' and 'lesbian' still present themselves (however delusively) as objective, empirical categories governed by empirical rules of evidence (however contested). 'Queer' seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception.[45]

By visibly transgressing norms, the queer (theoretician-practitioner) makes those norms visible as norms, rather than as inevitables or essentials.[46]

However, it has also been suggested that 'queer' does not apply only to sexual subjectivity. Others who have been positioned as 'marginal' also resist this positioning by troubling all such 'identity nominations', stressing the historical and political contingency of all such categories, and the potential fluidity and intersubjective nature of subjectivities. Queer politics is about the inclusion of difference rather than an assimilationist reduction of difference to the Same.[47]

The nomination 'queer', however, is not without its problems. While 'queer' deliberately dissolves the binary between theory and practice, locating queer as literal sexual 'practice' *does* run the danger of returning 'queer' to a certain epistemological category, creating another type of 'sexuality' - 'I'm not straight, gay, bi, I'm queer.'

It has been argued, for instance, that because queer is 'anti-normative', it sets itself up in opposition to 'normative', and therefore reinscribes another binary in place of heterosexual/homosexual. As Walters states, 'To link politically and theoretically around a "difference" from normative heterosexuality imposes a (false) unity around disparate practices and communities.' I would argue, however, that perhaps Walters - and many of those who identify themselves as 'queer' - read 'queer' too simplistically. 'Queer' is

not so much 'non-normative' but attempts to question the very notion of such a supposition. The danger, however, is that as 'queer' acts are repeated, it becomes a set of defined practices signifying another category.

Another criticism levelled at the term 'queer' is that as it proliferates (and in spite of Sedgwick's demand that its same-sex definitional centre be maintained)[48] any number of marginalised sexual practices will be gathered under the queer banner - which may, as Walters predicts, impose a false unity around diverse practices, reducing (or elevating) them all to 'queer'. Grosz worries that as:

> 'queer' is capable of accommodating, [it] will not *[sic]*doubt provide a political rationale and coverage in the near future for many of the most blatant and extreme forms of heterosexual and patriarchal power games. They too are, in a sense, queer, persecuted, ostracised. [...] It *does* make a difference which kind of sexed body enacts the various modes of performance of sexual roles and positions.[49]

Of course, this is a very thorny issue because, in a sense, Grosz is re-erecting boundaries of what constitutes an 'acceptable' or 'proper' sexual activity and is thus performing the role of the 'sex police'. Perhaps, again, an appropriate strategy would be to institute Elam's ethics of groundless solidarity, in which 'ethical decisions are not made on the basis of pre-established norms [... but the] search for the rule that may do justice to the case'.[50] In this way, sexual practice is open to continual contestations through an interaction with the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable, conducted within a network of shared responsibilities.

Another problem with 'queer' is that those bodies self-designated 'queer', like bodies marked 'lesbian', are still bodies and are likely to be read as signifiers of gender (and sexuality), no matter what queer performances they conduct. As a performative 'practice', queer is designated by action, not by surface signifiers but, as Biddy Martin suggests, perhaps within queer theory and practice the body needs to be 'conceived as a

drag or limit as well as a potential'.[51] This suggestion is supported by Jacqueline N Zita's exploration of the possibility of a 'male lesbian', who fails to become a lesbian because of her

> real powerlessness against the imposition of other-extending attributions that 'sex' the flesh. In this failure is a discovery of the historically located body - discovery of the historical gravity of a culturally constructed 'sexed' body.[52]

While we may be able to play with what the body does, we cannot actually throw off that body (although some of us can disguise it).

Finally, as a number of commentators have noted, there is a danger that 'queer' does not take enough account of other power relations which operate along the axes of race, gender and class. Jay Plum, for example, is troubled by 'practices in which the concerns and experiences of middle-class gay white men dominate discussions about what comes to represent queer'.[53] Suzanna Danuta Walters, meanwhile, reminds us that any notion of 'gender neutrality' is, as feminism has taught, actually a 'move of gender domination'. For Walters, 'queer discourse sets up a universal (male) subject, or at least a universal gay male subject, as its implicit referent.'[54] This issue of power relations presumably also lies behind Grosz's sentiment that the kinds of bodies enacting sexual performances does make a difference.

Such worries are mirrored in the gay and lesbian popular press, as evidenced by this quote which appeared in the American magazine 'Outlook':

> Queerness means nonassimilationist to me, but even so, there is a sense of conforming to being queer. It's still a privileged thing to be queer. I don't feel it's inclusive - there are race and class issues around this. There are people who cannot afford to be nonassimilationist; they are fighting just to live and eat.[55]

Indeed, in America, the group 'Queer Nation' experienced a number of divisive splits within its so-called 'inclusive' ranks, prompting female members to split off and establish

their own sub-group, because they felt their voices were not being heard within the larger group.

In response to all of the above criticisms, I would suggest that 'queer' can only continue to operate usefully as a deconstructive strategy if it insists on opening up sexual practice and questions of sexuality to continual contestation. Queer practice is located contextually, resisting specific discursively constructed norms, and does not signify an already known set of behavioural patterns but in fact interrogates such patterns. It would indeed be an ironic turn if 'queer practice', while resisting and contesting fixed grounds, established its own grounds.

As a contextually specific mode of enquiry, 'queer' would signify a particular type of engagement with, and questioning of, normative assumptions, in an attempt to denaturalise the supposedly naturally sexualised body (and of course its relationship with sex, gender and race). A queer practice would resist promoting itself as, or promising, some 'utopian' sexuality, located someplace in the future when we will all be (happily) queer together. Instead of closing down sexuality (which it is in danger of doing by offering itself as an 'alternative'), 'queer' would strive to keep it open as a space for continual negotiation - a negotiation that cuts across other axes of subjectivity. *We do not yet know what sexuality is or will be.* Like feminism, queer must be cognisant of the very real power operations that are implicit within its own discourse, engaging with its own ability to construct other bodies, binaries, exclusions, omissions.

Aware of the problems of nominating anything either 'lesbian' or 'queer', I wish to resist fixing these performances in either camp. Instead, I will examine the *disruptions* they enact and the questions they prompt - not just of the heterosexual matrix, but of other potentially unifying categories. Such disruptions may be queer *enactments*, therefore resisting *being* queer.

VICTORIA GOODWIN BAKER - *DYKE CUM FAG* (1994)

In many ways, Victoria Goodwin Baker's performance initially *does* present itself as a strategically 'queer' *performance*, highlighting in the course of its narrative a move from 'lesbian identification' to a troubling of that position, much as 'queer' seemingly troubles lesbian feminist politics.[56]

As the spectators enter the space the performer is already suspended centre stage from a harness and chain sling - a connotational index that immediately points to S/M practice and sex-play. The narrative begins with Baker telling the audience, in a conversational manner, that she came out many years ago as a lesbian, and separated her pre-lesbian life from her lesbian life, thinking that she would never sleep with a man again and had no male friends because she did not feel that it was right. In this brief introduction Baker has already set up the binary heterosexual/homosexual. She is either a heterosexual or a lesbian - the two cannot exist together and must be effectively separated into a pre- and post-. As evidence of her lesbian credentials, Baker foregoes any connection with the pre-, and separates herself both psychically and physically from it. Thinking that it would not be 'right' to associate with men anymore, she implies that there is a right way and a wrong way of 'being' a lesbian, thus indicating the existence of an internal surveillance mechanism that polices and judges her actions, a mechanism presumably installed by her wish to remain within the 'lesbian community' and all that that entails.

The narrative then takes an expected but sudden turn.

> And here I am in a sling, looking into Jason's strong blue eyes. [...] He tells me it's been years since he touched a woman sexually. He wants to fist me. I have desiring fantasies forever of being with a fag. I want him to fist me.

Inserted into and transgressing the 'woman-identified-woman' narrative is this 'other' transgressive narrative. From thinking she will never sleep with a man again, and having no male friends, Baker now reveals that she wants this man to fist her - a doubly transgressive revelation if set within the woman-identified lesbian paradigm. First, this sexual act will not be woman-identified; Baker has revealed that her fantasies are of having sex with a gay man - *not* women. Secondly, the act itself will be read as aggressive, as breaching the boundaries of what is acceptable lesbian sexual activity; a dildo is 'bad' enough, but a fist ... In the next part of the performance Baker's fantasies become actualised within the spoken narrative.

What is interesting in the above is that Baker specifies that her fantasies are concerned only with 'fags' - not therefore heterosexual men - or even, for that matter, homosexual men. She uses the specific word *fag* - a queer appropriation of a derisive term. However, in spite of this, it would be difficult not to locate dyke or fag under the rubric of same-sex activity. Thus, to some extent, the heterosexual/homosexual or straight/queer binary is questioned: is a lesbian having sex with a gay man having lesbian sex, gay sex or heterosexual sex? (Or is a dyke having sex with a fag having dyke sex, fag sex or straight sex?) Such questions are impossible to answer. How does one classify a type of sexual activity? By the bodies of the people that are involved in it? In this case, it is a man and a woman, so would that make it heterosexual sex? Or is sexual activity defined by the actual sex that is happening? Baker tells us that she is going to get fisted, which, in relation to the heterosexual matrix would place her in the passive, reactive position, while the gay man will be active and insertive. However, later these positions are reversed. Alternatively, is sexual activity defined by the *identities* of the people involved? Both participants are self-identified as 'homosexual', so can they be heterosexual while they are having sex together, or can the sex that they are having be

defined as heterosexual when the participants are homosexual? How can we define sexuality? Is it dependent on the type of sexual activity taking place at a precise moment, or is it dependent on the sex of the bodies that are involved (and which 'body' - the biological body or the 'sexual body' - both of which are 'constructed'), or is it merely a matter of self-identification?

The impossibility of definitively answering these queries reveals the fundamentally flawed system of categorisation. How are categories constructed? From what information are definitional boundaries drawn? Where is such information produced, interpreted and by whom? What this 'couple' are 'being', what this couple *are*, and therefore what this couple *does*, is outwith classificatory systems. In relation to Sedgwick's list of specifications, these people do not add up (1 + 1 does not = two). They are 'misaligned', indicating a sexual fluidity that crosses over binaries of sexuality and gender, blurring these binaries in the process while also problematising the classification of bodies (with such problematisation revealing the process of classification).

Paradoxically, however, is it not also possible that Baker's insistence on 'fags' serves to reinscribe the heterosexual/homosexual (straight/queer) binary at the same time that it troubles it? Is the danger of reinscribing this sexual activity as 'heterosexual' lessened because there is no self-determined heterosexual within the scene? Would the reading be different if, rather than the 'fag' fisting the dyke, a straight man was fisting her? Would the heterosexual male body signify differently within the scene? And if this is so, does this mean that the spectators read the fag body and the dyke body as distinctly different to the heterosexual female and male body? Is this distinction marked on these bodies or is it played out in the sexual activity? Does the spectator inscribe the body, fixing it into a position? Do we only assume such a distinction because we believe the

male and female homosexual body to be outside of heterosexually determined gender differences? That is, we do not think of the fag body as masculine or the dyke body as feminine in this scene because both are outwith the heterosexual system of exchange (begging the question, what then do we 'think'?). What if we had no previous knowledge of either of the people involved? What would we see? A man and a woman? A male and a female? A dyke and a fag? Something beyond signification?

Indeed, it could be stated that Baker's desire to have sex with a gay man is a desire to harness and combine the homophobically assumed 'softer' version of masculinity (that is, the feminine version of masculinity - which would be less of a threat to the lesbian figure), with the - also assumed - sexually predatory nature of men in general.[57]

Within a heterosexist discourse, Man = (white) heterosexual; 'fag' = not man (the gay man is not a 'real man' and as not a 'real man' assumes the only other position possible - 'woman'). It could be suggested, then, that Baker is reinscribing this reading of the gay man, by insisting that the person she has sex with is a fag. But this reinscription itself can be turned upside down. If the fag is a 'woman', then Baker is actually having same-sex lesbian sex. But, to take this line of thought to its - dare I say - 'logical' conclusion, within the Freudian paradigm the lesbian is masculine, so Baker is the masculine to the fag's feminine - and thus this blurring of identities can effectively be returned to the heterosexual matrix of man + woman, masculine + feminine.

Such reinscriptions and convolutions are undoubtedly excessive, but I would suggest that by insisting on the 'fag' some kind of 'pure' homosexuality is inscribed into the sexual action, thus negating any threat which may be caused by the inscription of the heterosexual figure - keeping it within the family, so to speak. The inclusion of two homosexuals (albeit of different morphological sexes) serves to erase the notion of

'heterosexuality', leaving in its place perhaps a scored through Derridean 'heterosexuality'.[58]

But does this notion of a '(homosexual) heterosexuality' not offer another possible reading: that of the homosexual 'playing' the role of the heterosexual, thus suggesting that one can 'play' anything without 'being' it? Can one repeat the act of heterosexuality differently, by enacting it from a homosexual body? Again, then, we return to a blurring of the hetero/homo binary. If the homosexual can 'play' the heterosexual, then there is nothing essentially innate about heterosexuality (and vice versa). As Judith Butler has suggested, it is in the repetition of that 'playing' that sexuality becomes a confirmed identity. However, having been told by the performer that this is an occasional encounter, we assume that such repetition is not undertaken here and does not therefore threaten the identity of 'the homosexual'. Such playing, though, necessarily *does* interrupt the repetitions that confirm that identity (or repeats them differently), therefore endangering the (homosexual) ground that such repetitions produce. To repeat differently is to trouble the notion of a given and fixed sexuality.

In what way, though, is the 'heterosexual act' repeated 'differently'? What is striking in this meeting of the male and female body is the absence of the penis. The two bodies are connected not by the penis but by the fist. The sexual action is not therefore that of the two 'organs' usually aligned and eroticised in assumed heterosexual sexual activity, and any notion of 'reproductive' sex is removed, as is the pervasive myth that men can only get sexual satisfaction through direct stimulation of the penis. It is the gay man that wants to fist the dyke - this is his desire as much as it is hers. While the materially present bodies could be read as heterosexual, the heterosexuality on display is removed from the common (mis)conceptions of what that means - and it is from this distance that the common assumptions of a normative heterosexuality are revealed.

Simultaneously, however, the assumed homosexual identity that is constructed specifically in opposition to heterosexuality - indeed, a homosexuality which could be seen to reinforce it - is also revealed, through its different enactment, as are both systems' mutual co-dependence. Not only is this not a 'heterosexual' scene, it is also not a lesbian or gay scene either.

However, as evidenced by the proliferation of questions that surface when attempting to make sense of this scene, to make it 'mean', within the performance there is a continuous sliding between a troubling of sexual identities and a reconfirming of them. Thus, though this performance may be posited as 'queer' in that it questions the categories of sexuality, suggesting that sexuality is much more fluid than such categories presume or allow, there are points at which the performance seems to return to an essentialisation of sexual identity.

While Baker indicates the constrictive and prescriptive nature of identity positions, asking herself questions as if being questioned by someone else - 'So if you're a dyke why don't you just have hot sex with women? Why this man thing, this fag thing?' - she also seems determined to prove that she *is* a dyke, in spite of the 'fag thing'. In answer to these questions, she insists that she does have hot sex with women, 'great sex with women,' but she's not talking about the frequent here, 'this is the occasional adventure [...] So hot, because it's so forbidden'. It is in the transgression of the prescribed that the erotic potential is heightened and realised. 'So hot when she straps one on and fucks him up the ass.' The transgression is that she, the dyke, is fucking him, the fag, she, the woman, is fucking him, the man, up the ass - the gender roles are switched, the woman has the phallus, the man is the 'receptacle'; she is 'active', he is 'passive' (although, of course, these terms are mutually dependent, and therefore no one

is either totally 'passive' or 'active'). Baker then reinscribes her identity as 'lesbian' by emphasising that the 'transgression' is purely sexual:

> I don't want to live happily ever after with that person. I don't look into their eyes and ask if we're in love. When I have sex with a woman, that question still occurs. It's just not an issue with a gay man.

In attempting to provide her own 'meaning' to having sex with a fag, Baker suggests that this is all it is - sex. There is no question of her falling in 'love' with him, because this is not what she desires from him. That is reserved for her encounters with women. The erotic is somehow separated from the romantic - and in this way, Baker is able to hold on to her own primary identification as a lesbian. She may fuck a man but she'll never love him. From this rationalisation, it appears that Baker is attempting to broaden the scope of what 'lesbian' can mean rather than 'queer' sexuality. She does not want to give up her lesbian identity entirely and only wishes to shift its boundaries.

Moreover, it is apparent that Baker does not reconceptualise 'love', but retains it within the dominant paradigm of heterosexuality, where 'love' becomes equated with 'long term relationship' and a lasting union with another person. Her definition of romance, then, would seem to be securely located within the already dominant patriarchal definitions and social organisation. To 'love' is to love singularly, and to love long. Baker does not attempt a queer reading or practice of either romance, or love (and the structures produced and maintained in their conventional meanings) leaving them standing on entirely unreconstructed normative ground.[59]

In the next sexual encounter that Baker narrates, she reveals that, while at a sex party, she whips a fag called Judy (more blurring of gender here) but again the previously 'queer' readings are both affirmed and troubled: 'He hadn't come, and I wanted him to know he could' - at which point Baker opens her legs, as if to suggest that he can come

by penetrating her - 'but he didn't want to and I was very relieved.' Baker does not say why she is relieved but one possibility suggests itself to me: to be penetrated by a penis would have different ramifications than being penetrated by a fist - it would perhaps make it more potentially 'heterosexual' and therefore trouble Baker's 'lesbian identity' too strongly. After stating that she was relieved, she goes on to tell Judy that 'everything we did tonight was very lesbian and he said "Yeah, the dyke in me was strong tonight."' This exchange presumes that there is such a thing *as* 'lesbian sex' - that it is quantifiable and describable. However, it also suggests that one does not have to *be* a 'lesbian' to have lesbian sex, which perhaps returns us to Zita's 'male lesbian' - and as this space is a semi-private space, it is possible that the male body in this context (sex-party) will not automatically signify 'man' and all that that simultaneously inscribes. If 'lesbian sex' is a type of sexual practice or exchange, then anyone can have it. But, again, to posit that there is such a thing may prescribe what can count as 'lesbian sex' - erecting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the process. If a woman having sex with another woman does not have 'lesbian sex', then what is she (having)? Such a question returns us to the feminist critique of particular lesbian sexual practices as being 'male'. This suggests, then, that 'sexual identity' resides solely in sexual acts. Judy's assertion that 'the dyke in me was strong tonight' also suggests, however, that subjectivities are multiply constituted and shifting - Judy is not just one sexual type, with one sexual type of behaviour, but can inhabit different positions at different times, in different contexts, thus indicating that sexuality is, again, performative rather than essential. (I wonder, then, if this prompts the erasure of all terms of 'identity' as such, replacing them purely with signifiers describing actions; that is, replacing 'I am a lesbian' with 'I am having lesbian sex'? - which nevertheless leaves intact the problem of defining 'lesbian sex').

Baker goes on to reflect on the exchange that occurred between them:

> I realised that my invitation to him to fuck vagina to penis style was me saying he couldn't be satisfied with me unless we did that, which was my heterosexual training. [...] He wrote to me and told me his lack of erection had made him feel free [....] Judy really challenged my understanding of gender - I've never been with a man who didn't want me to fuck him - to focus on his cock. What I knew of male sexuality was really changed by our experience.

As Baker asserts, the assumption that a man could only be sexually satisfied if he had ejaculated is part of the accepted discourse of masculinity (both heterosexual and homosexual; her further assumption that 'fucking' is only ever about a 'focus on his cock', however, goes unchallenged). However, Judy enjoyed the sexual experience without needing this 'climactic conclusion'. Baker states that her understanding of 'gender' was challenged by this experience: but does she mean by this that Judy was not masculine because he did not conform to the prescribed masculine behaviour, thus suggesting that not all men are masculine, or does she mean that the whole configuration of masculine/feminine and its interrelation with sexuality was challenged by this experience - revealed to be both a controlling and fictive binary mechanism? I think the performance could be read in either way.

Baker ends the performance by returning to the 'lesbian community' - to ask that she be allowed inclusion in it, a move which supports the earlier assertion that Baker does not want to entirely give up on identity categories:

> My experience of the lesbian world is that we're hell bent on defining what lesbian is and constraining ourselves. I know that I'm still a dyke even if I choose occasionally to act out my desire for men, and the men I'm attracted to are gay men, but I want to feel free to explore who I really am without the fear of being shut out of my community and I don't want to be stereotyped on any level because of my sexual identity.

On one level, of course, this could be read as a call for a greater recognition of a multiply constituted subjectivity that cannot be served by a singular, unified concept of 'sexual

identity' - identity overspills definitions. However, this reading is troubled by the phrase 'who I really am'. Baker is constrained by the lesbian community because of its tendency to prescribe 'proper' lesbian sexual activity. Such prescriptions do not allow her to be who she 'really' is. This 'real' posits a depth, an internal 'essence' or fixed ground to her identity; while the meaning of 'dyke' may be contested, Baker's identity as 'a dyke who sleeps with fags' is not. Although it could be argued that this 'real' is not an 'identity' but a process of becoming, rather than ever fully arriving, Baker finishes the performance by saying:

> I'm a dyke. [...] When I take a shit, I'm a dyke. When I fuck a man I'm a dyke.

Below all the sexual activity, underneath whatever cross-identifications, there is a distinct person who can be categorised, no matter what she does. It is not so much 'identity' that Baker is contesting, but the narrow significatory parameters of her own identity location. If the parameters were broadened, the significations could proliferate and then presumably she would gain community acceptance for who she 'really' is.

I would suggest then that this performance is ambivalent in that it does prompt examinations of sexual identity but at many points problematically returns the body back to an essential ontology of beingness - a being defined as dyke - rather than to a performative subjectivity. This is not the dissolving of categories so much as an enlargement of them. However, not intending to deny the political potential of this performance, I would also posit that Baker performs Butler's call for a contingent identity which acknowledges the need to take a ground, while also always contesting the limits of such a ground.

Momentarily reinserting a radical political vision here, perhaps such enlargements, if practised and assumed across all 'identities', would ultimately result in

the production of a proliferation of 'subject locations' (contingent, shifting), in which differences were not subsumed under general prescriptive nominations. What political formation, though, would be able to operate with such fragmentation? Again, we return to Elam's politics of undecidability, which is presumably the desire of a queer imagination - a 'localised' coalitional space formed around difference rather than sameness, in which negotiations between differences, or through differences, can be enacted to produce new spaces, which in turn will be renegotiated.

There is another problem within this performance, however, that does not make itself felt when writing about it. What we see on stage is only one part of the 'couple' (a dangerous word to use here) - the dyke. The fag is never physically present - he is represented only through the dyke's mouth as this is a spoken narrative and the scene is not actually being seen. What would happen if the materially present, undeconstructed, fag male body were to appear before our eyes? Would it be more difficult to blur the boundaries, move between the borders of male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, reinscribe the bodies differently? Would the body be more of a real drag on signification if it were materially present before our eyes? Would we continue to see the bodies as male and female, masculine and feminine, irrespective of what those bodies did together?[60]

ANITA LOOMIS - *FEMALE DEVIATIONS: AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF DESIRE* (1996)

How to show you what I saw? How to write what I felt? Would you see the same/Same, feel the same/Same?

Female? Not-male, other, Same, different.

Deviations? From the 'Truth'. From the 'story'. From expectations. From 'gender'. From 'sexuality'. From assumptions. From 'theory'. From the 'norm'.

Autobiography? Truth, Fiction, Real, Fantasy.

Desire?: Whose?

Imagine the Scene/Seen:

Dixon Place is a small performance studio located in the East Village of New York City. 'Performance space' does not really 'capture' the feel of the place. To enter you ring a buzzer from the sidewalk, push the door open, and ascend stairs, passing by what are obviously residential apartments on the way. Occasionally, you meet people on the stairs, entering and leaving their homes. The performance space is small, not much larger than a New York living room, while the 'stage' consists of the basic flat floor at one end. The seats are an assortment of comfy chairs, including sofas and armchairs. If you are lucky you will arrive early enough to get one of the armchairs. If not, you will be squashed into one of the sofas, with three or four other people. The 'house-lighting' is provided by lamps that are situated on little tables, scattered about the performance space. As the performance is about to begin, those sitting near the lamps reach out and turn them off.

The term 'intimate space' has literal connotations here. It feels a bit like 'home'. Everyone seems to know everyone else and the audience is yet another recurring audience, both men and women, and probably (unless my eyes deceive me - which is wholly possible) a fair smattering of lesbians and gay men (the founder and programmer of Dixon Place, Ellie Covan, is a very 'out' dyke). I may be an 'out-of-towner' but I am not a 'stranger' to this space, having volunteered in the past to sell tickets on the door in return for free tickets to see the shows (an attempt by the smaller spaces to be more egalitarian in relation to ticket pricing policies). I have been here enough times to feel 'part' of it. Martha Wilson, founder of Franklin Furnace - another of my temporary 'homes', but less intimate than this one - gets off her comfy chair at the front. Everyone stops talking and Martha announces the 'Franklin Furnace in Exile' performance.[61] The little table lamps are switched off. I sink into my comfy chair.

An image of a book jacket is projected onto a screen Upstage Left. The title of the book jacket is the same as the title of the piece - *Female Deviations: Autobiographies of Desire*. I look at my programme and read that this is the first section - 'An Introduction to the Subject' - of a seven section performance.[62] The cover of the projected book is a shade of pink with two interlocking symbols of the female gene - a common icon of lesbianism (while one symbol on its own is associated with feminism and/or 'women's issues'). The camera moves in and out to focus on the book cover with the image becoming clearer as it gets nearer and then more blurred as it zooms out again. The picture frame then widens to include a pair of glasses situated next to the book. A hand touches the book cover. At this point Loomis enters, attired in a grey suit, white shirt, black tie, and business shoes, carrying a sheaf of papers. She stands behind a podium located Upstage Right. She places the papers onto the podium, takes a lipstick out of her pocket, followed by a small compact mirror. She then paints her nose

red with the lipstick. While she is doing this, pages of the book on the screen are turned, and the camera focuses on individual words, such as tongue, breast, cunnilingus. Loomis then addresses the spectators: 'Can everyone hear me? If at anytime during this presentation you can't hear me, please let me know.'

The title, *Female Deviations: Autobiographies of Desire*, suggests reading the performance as a study in female sexuality, based on Loomis' own autobiographical history. However, the actual performance works against this reading, offering instead not a stable subject but a myriad of subject positionings that do not lend themselves to a single, straightforward reading. Following this first section, a dream about being carried away by water is narrated, while Loomis removes three balls from her trousers and juggles with them. In turn, this is followed by a section in which the narrator introduces the 'subject' of the FTM transsexual. Projected onto the screen are different body parts, shot close-up, so that you are never really sure what is being seen. In one shot, it looks as if an anus is being penetrated. Loomis repeatedly tries to draw the spectator's attention away from the screen, demanding that we 'Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain. Pay no attention to the woman behind the curtain. Come back tomorrow'. In the fourth section, the narrator remembers being a two year old child, and thinking she was a boy. She reveals that she desired to please her nursery teacher, that she was desperate to please her. In the fifth section Loomis plays with performer/spectator control, turning on its head the assumption that a woman on stage is there to be 'consumed'. After a series of different 'poses', accompanied by the line 'I want you to look at me', Loomis stares at the audience and says 'I want you to look at me when I'm talking to you'. In the sixth section, another sexually explicit scene is narrated, in which the narrator fist fucks her lover and then dreams of an avalanche of bodies. In the final scene, the narrator reveals how, when living alone, she got tired of seeing her own image

in the mirrors that were placed in the bathroom. As a result, she covered the mirrors with towels, so that she would be unable to see herself. The title of this scene is 'How to Become Your Own Best Fetish'. I have included these short summaries to indicate that this is not a 'story'; there is no beginning, middle or end, but a series of sections, albeit connected by the common thread of 'lesbian subjectivity'.

In relation to this I have decided to refer to the speaking subject within the performance as the 'narrator', in an attempt to avoid positioning Loomis herself as the subject of the 'stories', the privileged 'subject who knows'. There is no way I can tell whether these are 'true' or 'fictional' scenarios. The narratives shift from so-called 'reality' to 'dream' (fantasy?), but where does one end and the other begin? How can we be sure of the difference inbetween? Likewise, pronouns slide into and out of one another, positions fluctuate, power amasses and disperses, and the whole performance seems located on a fluid, fluctuating site (mirroring the dream that is narrated within the performance, of being on a bed which is floating on a sea of water).

'An Introduction to the Subject', with its deliberately ambiguous use of the word 'Subject' (performer? lesbian? lesbianism? female sexuality?), also establishes the notion of the 'subject of authority' whose knowledge will enlighten the spectator as to what these 'female deviations' are. Anyone who has perused libraries in search of information on 'female sexuality' will be familiar with the fact that many of the (older, pre-Queer) books posit the female and the lesbian as an 'object' of enquiry, to be researched, observed and, ultimately, explained (contained).

As the camera zooms in to focus on the book cover, it is as if the 'lesbian' is under the lens, being scrutinised and captured. As the cover then goes out of focus, the researcher/'expert' has momentarily lost the object of their study, which has become blurred. Another reading of this first image is that while the 'expert' may think s/he has

reached the core of 'lesbian desire' and can neatly categorise and explain it. the 'lesbian' herself is actually beyond the expert's vision - it is not the 'lesbian' who has been 'captured', but some blurred, undefined, unreadable 'object' that the expert has put in her place, that bears only vague similarities to the actual subject. Equally, it could be stated that the lesbian subject is placed under erasure by the lesbian object of study - a figure of 'imagination' that eclipses the 'real' lesbian (the unrepresentable lesbian).

The word 'deviations' indicates that what is under the expert's microscopic lens (camera lens) are female actions that turn away from the 'norm', while the inclusion of the word 'desire' links these 'deviations' to female sexuality. Alternatively, 'deviations' signifies that the narrations will deviate from each other, that there will be no one single path. As the camera angle widens to include a pair of spectacles the 'expert' subject is introduced into the text - the 'academic' who will shed light on, bring into focus, the object of this study. The glasses therefore have a double indexical function: as a metonym of the 'reader/scholar' and as a metaphor that suggests clear vision: 'to see clearly'.

As Loomis enters the space and takes up her position behind the podium the assumptions set up by the opening projected images are strengthened: Loomis is the 'expert', and the 'correct' place of the 'expert' is behind the podium. The spectators - me, us - are those to whom this expert knowledge will be imparted. It is for our benefit that these female deviations are to be revealed and explained. Like the 'male academic', Loomis is dressed in a suit and tie, carrying in her hands the results of her 'object of study'. All will be revealed. We will 'know' the object, having access to her through this knowledgeable figure.

As soon as Loomis has positioned herself behind the podium, however, she begins to insert spokes into this reading, and dramatically deflates the image of the

'expert'. First, she takes out a lipstick and, just as we assume she is going to cross from 'male academic mimic' to 'high-powered female academic' by applying the marks of 'femininity', she paints - not her lips - but her nose red. The 'academic expert', with this one simple gesture, is immediately transformed into a clownish figure, although the previous marks are not entirely erased, so that the figure standing behind the podium is like a human palimpsest, bearing the traces of the transformation. The words appearing on the screen that attempt to 'capture' female sexuality can be read against Grosz's worry, as cited earlier, that the 'new' is in danger of being tied 'to models of what is already known, the production of endless repetition, endless variations of the same'.[63] However, as the performance progresses, what becomes obvious is that these 'deviations' escape the confines of such words.

Having applied the lipstick to her nose (a female deviation?), in spite of the 'clown face', Loomis remains within the 'proper' academic framework, stating that this is a 'presentation' which she will be delivering. This reinstates the spectators' expectations that these 'notes' will theoretically shed light on 'the lesbian'. However, such expectations are again shattered when Loomis begins to read from her papers.

...Wait. How can I share this experience with you? How can I translate what I heard, felt, saw (before me and in my mind) into words, how can I make the words here carry my emotions, carry you to that place? My attempt will fail. I know that from the outset. First, I cannot capture the performance, second, I cannot make my words capture me, third, I do not know what you will read.

If I begin at the end: I felt excited, electrified, moved, alive, carried away.

Empty words.

My breath was taken away. Breathless.

Back to the beginning.

Loomis begins to read from her papers:

> *I hear the door open and shut again. I hear the tumblers in the lock roll. I hear the floor in the hall creak as she shifts from one large booted foot to the other. I hear her shrugging off her jacket. Hanging it on the back of the chair. I hear her breathe out a long breath, like she's been holding it in for hours. It empties out of her. Then a long inhale and another long, slow exhale. I hear her walking down the hallway now. Not walking. Striding.*
>
> *It's my favourite time of day. The time when daddy comes home. All the secrets I've been saving to tell him. What I've been doing all day while he is gone away to wherever and whatever it is he does all day. I went to his office once, but I still don't have a clue.*

[The word on the page projected onto the video screen is 'cunnilingus'. Then the page turns to 'Chapter 1' - 'The meaning of lesbianism'.]

> *I hear him stop at the dining room sideboard and pour himself a drink. I hear the bottle clink against the other bottles, against the glass, against the other bottles as he returns it to the liquor tray. Scotch neat. He has taught me how to pour it, how to swirl it around in the tumbler, how to take a long sip, swallow and exhale, the alcohol fumes wafting out his mouth and nose. Later when I am in high school, I will follow this ritual myself as soon as I get home, when my father is not home.*
>
> *She's tall. The hallway takes only four or five strides and it is behind her. She strides into the room and across the room. From where I sit, I watch her entrance with my arms folded, legs crossed, chin up. I am counting my breaths. Slowly in, slowly out. If this is my favorite moment of the day, the moment when she walks back into this room from wherever she has been, she is not going to know this from me.*
>
> *She stops, one hand on her hip, head tipped to the side. She surveys my posturing with clear eyes, lets out a long low whistle, like an owl. 'Waiting again?'*
>
> *I don't answer her. She doesn't ask anymore questions. Crossing to me, she lifts me up by my elbows. I can feel her sure grip through the thin silk of my robe. When she kisses me, it is not a perfunctory evening greeting. Her mouth slams into mine and I feel as if she will take away all my carefully counted breaths. I feel myself lose balance, feel her catch me with one hand behind my back while smoothly unfastening my robe with the other. Through an open window, I can feel an evening breeze across my belly and my thighs. My nipples go hard. She places a booted foot between my two bare feet and my legs open up for her. She slides a hand down to my pubic hair, takes a fistful and tugs.*

'Tell me everything.' And I am about to give her every secret of my day when she adds 'Please'.

I hate 'please'. Don't ask me 'please'. If she doesn't know I'm hers for the taking, if she hasn't figured out my secret, that she just has to know and act without all the niceties, then no, I won't breathe a word of myself to her. 'No', I growl at her, unable and unwilling to tell her more. More as in: 'You better fuck me right now!' Let her owl eyes look at me. Let her figure out that I want her to tighten her grip not loosen it with 'please'. I see the smallest surprise widen the corners of her eyes. A slight shock of confusion. I feel desperate. Desperate that she will stop, doubting herself and my desire for her. But I can't interrupt the scene to reassure her. I don't want to. She has to know. She has to know that her self-assurance is my turn-on. Her self-reliance gives me permission to show her my complete devotion. 'NO!' I challenge her again. I breathe hard, hoping my manipulations have led her to her own answer.

'Sit down,' she tells me, shoving me as she releases her hold on my cunt. [...] 'I said tell me everything. If you won't do that, then you can show me everything. Spread your legs. [...] Touch yourself', comes her instruction. [...] 'That's better', she says. 'I think you missed me today. I think you were waiting for me to come home so you could get fucked. I think you didn't want to tell me. But I know you're going to show me that I'm right.'

With that she unzips her jeans and her fat purple dildo springs out. My hips involuntarily jump off the couch like my cunt is trying to jump onto her cock. She pushes me down, laughing. 'No. You said, "No". If you won't talk to me, use your mouth for something else.' She shoves the chubby sex toy between my lips. With a moan I take her in.

I love giving women head. I just wish one more woman was here so I could get fucked while simultaneously going down on my lover. Just thinking about this gets me busier on her dick. She has as tight grip on my crew cut now as she had on my pubes and is stealing my breath in earnest.

'Next. Time. You. Tell. Me. Every. Thing. When. I. Say. So!' She punctuates each word with a deep thrust into my throat and shudders big on the last syllable. She comes hard [...] I can't hold it back any longer. I reach behind me and grab her by the hair. Letting out my own scream, I come. Pushing back on her cock, pushing air from my lungs, my mind takes off running. She knows all my secrets already. She knows this is my favorite time of day. The time when my daddy comes home.[64]

What did I see/hear? Desire.

What kind of desire?

What did I see/hear? I don't know. I felt... I felt... I felt.

Let me go back to another 'beginning', another 'frame:

> Freud: The girl acknowledges the fact of her castration, and with it, too, the superiority of the male and her own inferiority; but she rebels against this unwelcome state of affairs. From this divided attitude three lines of development open up. The first leads to a general revulsion from sexuality. [...] The second line leads her to cling with defiant self-assertiveness to her threatened masculinity. To an incredibly late age she clings to the hope of getting a penis some time. That hope becomes her life's aim; and the phantasy of being a man inspite of everything often persists as a formative factor over long periods. This 'masculinity complex' in women can also result in a manifest homosexual choice of object. Only if her development follows the third, very circuitous, path does she reach the final normal female attitude, in which she takes her father as her object and so finds her way to the feminine form of the Oedipus complex.[65]

The contextual 'frame' *for* the performance (for me) is the intimate, homely, familiar space of Dixon Place. The frame *of* the performance is the title *Female Deviations: Autobiographies of Desire*. This frame is located inside Freud's frame, but wildly exceeds it, and in that excess reveals the psychoanalytic frame's narrow and prescriptive perimeters. The frame is inadequate to this subject.

Many theoretical feminist texts draw on psychoanalytical accounts of subject formation, focusing attention on the difficulties that psychoanalysis poses for feminists, in relation to women being placed only as the objects of desire, never the subjects, and the conflation of the phallus with the penis. However, too often the fact that same-sex desire is seen as deviant or 'abnormal' (or impossible) within the Freudian psychoanalytic paradigm is either mentioned fleetingly or completely disregarded.[66] According to this paradigm, subjectivity is constituted in relation to difference - having or not-having the phallus, a difference which organises subjects into binary opposites, the most important being male/female and masculine/feminine; the young girl transfers desire for the mother to the father, while young boys transfer the desire for the mother with a desire for other women and a wish to be *like* the father. However, as Wilton states:

> Just *why* young girls should feel desire for their fathers or young boys for their mother is never problematized. Heterosexuality remains the unquestioned definitional norm, and the radical potential of Freud's theorising runs aground on his inability to critique the gender relations of his culture and his time.[67]

It is important to note then, that alongside the phallocentricity operating within Freud's paradigm there is also a heterocentricity, and the two operate in tandem, ensuring the coupling of active male with passive female.

While Freud admittedly asserts that prior to this process of differentiation, the non-socialised infant has a bisexual disposition, Butler rightly identifies an already existent heterocentrism within this assertion since 'bisexual' already posits a 'focus on the fall into twoness' - prompting the question, why only two sexualities? Furthermore, as Butler states, 'to what extent do we read the desire for the father as evidence of a feminine disposition only because we begin, despite the postulation of primary bisexuality, with a heterosexual matrix of desire.'[68] When Freud himself addresses 'lesbianism', rather than seeing it as a different sexual practice he returns it (thereby effectively controlling it and erasing the notion of a female active sexuality) to a variation on heterosexuality: the 'lesbian' does not specifically desire other women as a woman; her desire is masculine.

In this first section of *Female Deviations* the narrator talks about her favourite time of day - the time when Daddy comes home. However, there is not one 'Daddy' present in the text but two, one to an extent superseding the other. At first it is difficult to determine who 'Daddy' is, and who the narrator is, as the story is actually two stories, a story of past and present, with the two interconnecting. The pronoun within the narrative switches although the content of the narrative remains the same, as if a seamless whole. The female 'Daddy' is replaced with a seemingly real 'father' or perhaps the Imaginary father - all powerful and inaccessible, while the narrator herself is

positioned as a child, not yet in high-school. The story then returns to the female 'Daddy'. The daughter-father narrative and this other narrative begin to overlap, mirror. re(as)semble. The narrator has already stated that the time when her 'real' Daddy comes home is 'my favorite time of day'. In relation to this 'other' Daddy she says: 'This is my favorite moment in the day, the moment when she walks back into this room from wherever she's been.' The 'wherever' becomes a duplication of the 'wherever and whatever it is he does all day'. The father and this woman are becoming merged. In the past and the present, the narrator 'waits' for her Daddy to come home.

How, then, to read this scene? In many ways it remains impossible to definitively 'read' it, since meanings keep appearing and then slipping away. An appropriate response, perhaps, when set beside the figure of Loomis, standing behind a podium reading the first chapter of her 'thesis', 'Female Deviations', a title mirrored by the chapter heading that appears projected onto the screen: "The Meaning of Lesbianism'. (The 'meaning' ascribed to lesbianism is always a projected meaning?) Lesbianism, then, will be given meaning through reading it as a 'female deviation'. But whose meaning will be produced here, and from where will that meaning arise? From within what frame is lesbianism read, enabling it to 'mean' a certain thing? The slippage of meanings experienced here suggests that there is not one frame, but multiple frames, multiple meanings. While the initial frame may be that provided by Freud, the meanings that proliferate destabilise the 'coherence' of Freud's explanations.

Loomis narrates her 'Female Deviation' immediately after reddening her nose with lipstick. One is reminded of Freud's 'most extraordinary' case in which 'a young man had exalted a certain sort of "shine on the nose" into a fetishistic precondition.' The narrator, then, bears the fetishistic mark, which Freud describes as 'a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and [...] does not want

to give up.'[69] Is this mark, then, representative of a spectatorial wish to turn Loomis into a 'fetish' - the lesbian can only be read as a woman who 'has' a penis? Or is it a mark which Loomis herself claims, thus suggesting that she both does and does not accept her own 'castration', her red nose a disavowal of her lack of 'penis' or a lack of what that comes to signify in a phallocentric culture? Or is it an appropriation of the theory of fetishism in which the red nose could signify a fetish but could also signify a mockery of that theory, a theory which rests on the prior belief that woman is, in the first instance, castrated? Indeed, the entire Freudian theory of sexuality rests on the ground of woman's castration (and the corollary narcissistic investment in the penis), since it is that castration that determines the direction of sexual drives in that the one who is not castrated fears that he could be, while the one who is castrated desires the property that she has lost. It is assumed that it is this relation to the phallus, a symbol of the penis, which structures sexuality and sexual desire, notably in a heterosexual direction.

How, then, is lesbian sexuality represented in this performance? What does lesbianism 'mean' here? My experiencing of this performance was marked by a continual vacillation. Was the lesbianism conjured before me merely an imitation of heterosexuality, where one woman was 'masculine', and the other 'feminine'? While such a conjuring may serve to dislocate, in the case of one woman, sex from gender, and the assumption that one sex will direct its desire towards the opposite sex, the meaning I here ascribe to lesbianism is produced in relation to heterosexuality - the latter becomes the frame through which the scene is read. Moreover, heterosexuality is figured in this meaning as the original, after which lesbianism can only be a copy - and as a copy, is presumed inferior to the 'real' thing. However, remembering Butler here, the very concept of an original demands the prior concept of the copy - through which the original constitutes itself *as* original. In which case, the so-called 'copy' in fact must be

said to come before the 'original'. This reversal, however, as soon as it is instituted, produces another reversal, since if the 'copy' is taken to be the 'original', it can only be that 'original' through the presence of a 'copy'. That is, as soon as 'homosexuality' is reread as the original, it is no longer a copy and therefore can no longer precede 'heterosexuality' but must follow it. Through this incessant chain of reversals, then, as Butler asserts, 'the entire framework of copy and origin proves radically unstable as each position inverts into the other and confounds the possibility of any stable way to locate the temporal or logical priority of either term.'[70]

However, as Butler goes on to suggest, this process of inversion of original/copy, viewed from a psychic/political perspective rather than a logical one, reveals that that which takes itself as 'origin', is in some way actually produced - or *re*produced - by that which is seen to be an imitation. The nomination of an act as derivative institutes the ground of an original, and without that so-called derivative act, the 'original' could not claim itself as the norm. In Butler's terms, '*imitation* does not copy that which is prior, but produces and *inverts* the very terms of priority and derivativeness. Hence, if gay identities are implicated in heterosexuality, that is not the same as claiming that they are determined or derived from heterosexuality [....]'[71]

Heterosexuality depends on the presence of an 'imitation', the 'risk' that is figured as homosexuality, so that it can continuously reaffirm - through an incessant repetition - 'its own naturalized idealization'. It is the risk that compels the repetition of heterosexual performance, and as such, the risk can never fully be eradicated, since the very repetition which produces the idea of a normative heterosexuality is dependent upon it. Thus, as Butler states, it is important to recognise that gay and lesbian identities are not outwith the domain of heterosexuality but are in part structured 'by dominant heterosexual frames but they are *not* for that reason *determined* by them.'[72] Instead, they

'are running commentaries on those naturalized positions as well, parodic replays and resignifications of precisely those heterosexual structures that would consign gay life to discursive domains of unreality and unthinkability.'[73] When heterosexual constructs appear in gay and lesbian identities, Butler suggests that rather than perceiving them as unwanted intrusions of 'the straight mind' they should be taken as opportunities in which 'straightness' is repeated, with that very act of repetition - occurring as it does in a non-heterosexual frame - providing an occasion for resignification. The very repetition of straightness, then, provides an opportunity for it to signify differently. Such a resignification of heterosexual constructs 'brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called original, but it shows that heterosexuality only constitutes itself as the original through a convincing act of repetition. The more that 'act' is expropriated, the more the heterosexual claim to originality is exposed as illusory.'[74]

Could Loomis' narrative be read then, not in the conventional sense of being an imitation of an original heterosexuality, but as a performance of sexuality in which that very concept of the 'original' is contested, or in which the construct of heterosexuality signifies differently through its location in a lesbian exchange? Of course, *any* reading of this performance will be produced by the spectator, irrespective of the intentions of Loomis, and therefore any possible resignifications in a sense remain the property of the viewer. There is no guarantee that the entire scene will not be read, throughout, as merely an imitation of heterosexuality, with heterosexuality remaining the uncontested norm and frame through which meaning is prescribed. Accepting this, however, I would repeat my earlier observation that one effect of this performance is that significations proliferate, and it is probable that such proliferations will include resignifications, even if the threat produced by these are contained by a return to their more conventional

meanings. The very term 'return' implies that a move *has* taken place, and in that movement assumptions have been destabilised, even if momentarily.

The narration in this first section performs a switching of 'Daddies', and in that switch the narrator plays with and within the Freudian frame of 'proper' female sexuality. The narrator's 'object of desire' is the 'father' - the narrator has successfully reached 'the final normal female attitude in which she takes her father as her object'. And yet, the 'father' is not the 'father' but the 'Daddy' - a female father. On the one hand, the narrator is 'normal', but on the other she is 'deviant' - has deviated from the path of normality. Her object choice both 'is' and 'is not' the 'father' - or one like him. Her object choice, could, similarly, be seen to combine both her original and second object choice - the mother and father dissolved into/onto the one body. Is the doubling of the 'father', then, a parody of Freudian thought? If Freudian theory insists that the 'proper' object of desire for the female is the 'father', and that all future objects will be replacements of him, where is the lesbian's father figure to be found? On/in a woman called 'Daddy'? Freudian 'conceptions' of 'normal' female sexuality are refracted through a 'perverse' lens, perverting the theory in the process. Or are they? What of the figure of 'Daddy'?

Is the lesbian Daddy assumed to *be* the 'father' figure rather than a potentially radical appropriation of that position? The Daddy here could easily be located as masculine identified, while the other woman is located as feminine identified, in which case the scene that is being played could simply be contained within the masculine/feminine binary structure. To arrive at such a reading, however, certain unruly or contradictory meanings would need to be suppressed. First, although the Daddy may signify the gendered position of 'masculinity', throughout the narration she is positioned as a 'she'. There is, then, an immediate dislocation of gender and sex, which potentially

enacts a disruption of the assumed coherency and unity between them. Of course, there is already a disruption of normative heterosexuality within the scene, since it figures an erotic exchange between two women. However, figuring one of these women as a 'Daddy', and therefore as masculine identified, could potentially return the scene to that of normative sexuality, in that although the couple are of the same sex, their genders are seen to be complimentary opposites. In which case, although sex may be uncoupled from gender, gender remains tied to sexuality, structuring the direction of desire.

Such a reading, though, must presume that the 'Daddy' *is*, first, masculine identified, and that such an identification is singular and unambiguous. Contesting this assumption, I do not intend to definitively - or defensively - argue against the possibility that the Daddy is masculine identified, since such an identification, when figured within the context of a lesbian exchange, may, as Butler indicates, provide the occasion for masculinity to be resignified. The multiple readings which follow, then, are based on the fact that I could not decide, absolutely, what the 'Daddy' meant, since she was a figure of ambivalence.

Can the Daddy be read, simply, as a woman who is masculine identified (and therefore as evidence of Freud's theory pertaining to the 'inverted woman')? Where is this masculinity inscribed, or to be more precise, read? Of course, the nomination 'Daddy' prompts a particular reading. But then this nomination is confused, as already stated, by the fact that the one who bears that name is also nominated as a 'she'. The 'Daddy', though, is the one who appears to occupy the powerful position within this scene since she is the dominant partner, signifying authority. Yet again, however, this dominance is radically undermined by the actual exchange that occurs between the Daddy and the so-called passive partner, perhaps prompting a different conception of power, and thus freeing it from its fixed place in the binary structure of power/powerless.

Foregrounded within the narrative is the fact that each woman *plays* a specific *role*. The Daddy does not automatically assume dominance, but must perform it, and in this instance it is her *performance* that signifies her authority. (Could this be an occasion in which masculinity is resignified *as* a performative achievement, since the masculinity repeated here is seen to be *assumed*, and signifies masculinity only through a re-citation of the norms presumed to inhere in that position, therefore suggesting that 'masculinity', rather than a given, is only ever a citational practice?) However, who is it that authorises the authority of the Daddy, conferring upon her performance a seal of approval? In a sense, anyone can *be* the 'lesbian Daddy' provided that they can successfully play the role of the 'lesbian Daddy' - success being defined not by its approximation to the 'real father' figure, but by its approximation to the lesbian-Daddy, a signifier given meaning within *lesbian* sexual exchange. In a sense, then, the signifier 'father' is redeployed within this context, signifying differently as one who is able to *act* a specific role, a role which has been determined and agreed within a lesbian context. It is not that the lesbian Daddy *is* a lesbian Daddy but that she performs as one.

What is revealed in the narration, however, is that it is the so-called 'passive' partner who decides that the Daddy is not playing her role according to the rules of Daddy role-play. When the Daddy says 'please', a rule has been broken. She is not demanding but is asking. This is not the role of the 'Daddy'. This wrong move results in the 'passive' partner having to decide how to respond. In this instance, she refuses the Daddy's request, thus refusing to play her 'passive' role. As soon as she refuses, the active/passive positions have reversed, since the passive partner is actively attempting to push the Daddy into becoming active rather than passive, but her own strategically determined action will, momentarily, position the Daddy in the passive position since control has been wrested from her. Thus, it would appear that it is the passive partner

that is active all along, since it is she that determines whether the play of the Daddy is up to scratch.

Moreover, her *decision* to stop playing the passive role reveals that the passive 'feminine' role is equally a *role*. The playing of any role demands an active engagement, belying the so-called passivity that is represented by it. There is a disjunction, then, between the role that is represented and the activity that is required to represent that role. Moreover, if the 'passive' partner engages in this particular role-play because she enjoys the feeling of being passive, she is actively satisfying her own desire, and her very taking up of that position is an active taking up. Perhaps, then, it is *not* that she enjoys being passive, but actually enjoys being active, with her play of 'passivity' enabling that position of dominance.

Yet this reversing of the active/passive is not the only story, since the 'passive' partner depends equally on the 'dominant' partner to be able to play her passivity. As becomes evident in the scene, as soon as the Daddy plays her role wrongly, the passive partner is unable to play at being passive. Thus, both positions are mutually dependent on each other, since each, through an appropriate playing, will enable and sustain the desired positioning of the other. Both women, then, are *actively* involved in playing the scene, and the playing is a very deliberate performance - in which mistakes, as evidenced, can be made, attesting to the fact that it is always play. If this is so, it is no simple matter to determine who actually is passive and who is active. Could it be that power, here, is figured as a negotiation rather than a property belonging to either woman? And that the erotic charge of the scene *is* precisely this negotiation, this deliberate playing of roles which - through their liability to be misplayed - enables the *play* of a shifting power dynamic, a power which cannot finally be fixed since both passive and active seem to invert, coincide and revert?

Of course, my insistence on this as a *playing* of *roles* may not destabilise normative heterosexuality, assumed to be a *natural* expression of gender, which in turn is assumed to be a natural expression of sex, since the very *playing* of the roles may position the play as imitation of the norm - thus reconfirming it *as* the norm. But surely the fact that these roles are evidenced *as* roles also entails confronting the possibility that the so-called 'natural' expressions of masculinity and femininity, and heterosexuality, are equally roles - roles that have themselves become naturalised precisely through the compulsion to play them repetitively? Seeing these roles as the playing out of compelled prescribed 'rules' may then serve to denaturalise normative heterosexuality. Moreover, the very fact that this is a play of roles prevents 'the' lesbian from appearing - all we are faced with is roles and it is therefore impossible to deduce any 'truth' of lesbianism that may be thought to lie beneath such playing. The 'real' lesbian, in fact, never appears.

Returning to the earlier question of where the masculinity of the 'Daddy' is inscribed, however, the spectator is obviously confronted with the image of the dildo. What exactly does the dildo signify here though? In anti-S/M theories and heterosexist commentaries lesbian sex with a dildo is perceived as either not 'lesbian' sex or a (poor) imitation of heterosexual sex: because they are not really woman-identified, they ape heterosexual sex and patriarchal power relations; or because they do not have the 'real' thing, they make do with an inferior substitute. Both reactions assume that the dildo is a substitute for the penis, and this assumption is not denied within the narration, since the narrator refers to the dildo as a dick and a cock, terms more usually used to refer to the anatomical penis. (Interestingly, Butler refers to the penis not as an anatomical given, but as an 'imaginary' property, perceiving it as an idealisation of a body part.[75] Is it possible, then, that the 'dick' and 'cock' here are imaginary investments in a body-like thing? Which is not to deny that such an 'investment' could merely serve to reprivilege

the penis which this body-like thing is said to imitate.) Conflating the dildo with the penis would enable another return of this scene to an imitation of heterosexuality, since the Daddy, as masculine identified, wants a penis but because she can't have one she has to make do with an inferior substitute. However, what if this dildo isn't an imitation of the penis, but that which provides the occasion for the phallus to symbolise (as in, the phallus *is* not the dildo, but that which it symbolises)? That is, this Daddy wears the dildo to signify that she 'has' the phallus?

If the dildo is only ever inscribed as an *imitation* of the penis, is this because only those that really have a penis can 'have' the phallus? Thus, the idea that a woman may be able to 'have' the phallus is disavowed by nominating her as an impostor, as someone *pretending* to 'have' the phallus, signified through her pretend penis. In which case, the penis and phallus are revealed to be more synonymous than Lacanian theory would admit. Returning to Butler's inversion of copy and original, is it the very possibility of an imitation of the penis that serves to produce the 'original' as the 'original'? The 'real' thing can only achieve its 'realness' through the possibility of the 'unreal thing', and it is the risk of those positioned as 'masculine' being read as 'unconvincing' or 'fake' that compels them to repeat incessantly their having of the 'real' thing - proving, so to speak, that they are 'real men'. If they are not 'real men' then the only other possible place for them is as woman - castrated. Does this insistence on the 'realness' of the penis - dependent on the occasions of its absence or imitation - perhaps not serve to dissemble the fact that, within the Lacanian scheme, no-one can 'have' the phallus? Is the castigated lesbian who dares to wield a dildo the figure for this displaced fear, by which - if *she* is positioned as an imitation - their own imitation can be denied? Here, then, perhaps, the woman with the dildo, through being read as a poor imitation, reveals the fact that those who supposedly have the 'real' thing can continuously assert that fact

only if there is the possibility of a fake. However, if having the 'real' thing *was* actually an undisputed fact, it would presumably not require any sort of repetitive assertion. The repetition of the real, against the fake, is that which constitutes the real as the real. The disavowal of the possibility of the lesbian actually having the phallus could then be read as precisely the necessary condition for it being the singular property of another body. If the lesbian could actually have the phallus then there would be no fake and therefore no occasion for this performative repetition.

Am I merely writing my own desire, however, by suggesting the possibility that the lesbian could 'have' the phallus - an instance of my supposed 'penis-envy'? If I say the lesbian cannot 'have' the phallus because her 'not having' provides the occasion for those who have a penis to repetitively insist they 'have' it, I may be showing how it is that the penis comes to 'have' the phallus, but the power of that latter term remains undiminished; he may 'have' it, but I wish she could 'have' it. Of course, to claim that the lesbian with the dildo can 'have' the phallus implies that women can have it without being phallic, castrating women, which would be one benefit of insisting that the lesbian can 'have' it. Can she 'have' it, however, in a way that would deplete its power rather than reiterate it? Butler substantiates this possibility in her chapter 'The Lesbian Phallus', working within Lacanian psychoanalysis, and showing that inspite of Lacan's claims that the phallus is not the penis, the former does remain dependent on the latter in order to appear - as a symbol. Thus, there is a relation between the phallus and penis, even if that is one of negation (the phallus *is* not the penis). Butler's next question, then, is to ask whether it must necessarily only ever be the penis that provides the occasion for the phallus to signify. Again, working within the very terms of psychoanalysis, she deduces that the phallus is given the status of the transcendental signifier through its nomination as transcendental, when, in fact, the phallus is merely another effect of the

process of signification and not its cause. Indeed, as far as I understand the hugely complex argument of 'The Lesbian Phallus', Butler reads the phallus as it appears within the Lacanian scheme as a transfigurative idealisation of a body part, which is therefore necessarily an imaginary idealisation. This idealised body part, instituting a kind of synecdochal operation, serves to confer a sense of control and integrity onto the body, becoming its centre and therefore also controlling its body's boundaries - enabling the body to have a perceived form. The idealisation of a body part is itself the result of external identifications with idealised images which become projected images, producing a sense of the self.

Butler's point, then, is that if the phallus is an idealised body part, an imaginary body part produced through identifications with a projected external image, then not only are such identifications liable to be various because they cannot be strictly controlled, but the phallus could be figured by any idealised body part and therefore must be transferable. For Butler, the more various the idealised body parts or body-like things which serve as occasions for the phallus to signify, the more the phallus and penis will become separated. The more this separation occurs, the more liable it is for the phallus to signify differently, since if the phallus no longer only appears through its symbolising of the penis, then that which it signifies will no longer be connected to that which the penis signifies. For Butler, then, the phallus is only another signifier, and as such, will signify variously and unexpectedly. Within this rereading of what the phallus is, its transcendential status is denied. To claim, then, that the lesbian phallus can exist is not intended to repeat or uphold the performatively produced privileged status of the phallus, but to diminish its power through affording the opportunity to produce different significations through different repetitions.

Returning to the performance, though, if the dildo is read as an imitation of the penis, then to say that the Daddy is in the position of 'having' the phallus does not enable much of a separation of phallus and penis. Moreover, if the literal having of the dildo is then placed in a structural relation to the narrator who evidently doesn't have the dildo, are we back once more to a 'having' and 'being' the phallus? Such a 'having' must be immediately destabilised, however, by the fact that the lesbian with the dildo who may 'have' the phallus, evidently doesn't 'have' it in the usual way, since she is still read as a *woman*. If the dildo here signifies a 'having' of the phallus, I am not then sure what that 'having' means.

All of these readings are based on the assumption that there is an equivalence in the scene between dildo/penis/phallus, and that 'masculinity' is denoted simply through reference to the penis or its visual substitute. However, within the performance it is notable that it is the 'passive' partner who confers a morphological status on the dildo. When she is not actively engaged sexually with it, it is merely a dildo; when she desires to jump onto it, it becomes a cock; when this is refused, it is returned to a 'sex toy'; when it is taken into the narrator's mouth, it is something that can be 'gone down on' and sucked off, becoming a 'dick'. It is the 'passive' partners actions and desires which confer a 'real' status onto the dildo, not the object in itself. Moreover, it is the narrator's desire which is most fully described, in relation to this object, and not that of the Daddy. It is the narrator's imagination, then, which turns the sex-toy into something else, not the Daddy's wish to 'have' a penis. It is, of course, much harder to read the 'passive' partner's desire within a heterosexual framework, because if one says that she merely wants the 'real' thing, then what is there to stop her from getting it? If she wants to be with a man, rather than be one, why is she with a woman?

If it is the 'passive' partner who confers meaning onto the dildo, who makes it mean, could we say that she 'has' the phallus, if the phallus here signifies 'power' and control of meaning? But on what part of the body is that 'having' of the phallus signified, because she doesn't even have the dildo? And again it remains more than possible to read this from within a Lacanian scheme, since I could say that the Daddy desires the narrator because the latter 'has' the phallus, which the Daddy 'lacks' and therefore wants - inspite of the fact that she wears a dildo. And so 'having' and 'being' remain mutual opposites. And yet they are not wholly opposite, because both are women and therefore neither can 'have' the phallus in the traditional sense, but both can 'be' it. And if the Daddy *visibly appears* to 'have' the phallus, it is only if the phallus *is* the dildo, and only then because the narrator 'gives' it to her, and if the narrator 'gives' it to her, does that mean that she 'had' it? And is this merely another replaying of the Lacanian scheme anyway, since it is woman's 'desire' for the phallus that reflects back its power to the one who claims to 'have' it. Is it the narrator's desire to have that which she 'lacks', figured in the performance through her naming of the inanimate as animate, that inscribes it with phallic property? The point is, I am not sure what *is* the phallus here, or even if there is one, inspite of the presence of the dildo; the actual erotic exchange between the two women diminishes the assumed intrinsic symbolic power of the dildo (the assumed 'penis substitute'), while still retaining it as *one* figure of desire within the sexual scene.

What, though, of the feminist discourse which would also seek to return the lesbian with a dildo to an imitation of heterosexuality, a return which is in fact a judgement? The woman who wears a dildo is perceived to be not woman-identified, and thus to not be a 'proper' lesbian. The judgement conferred on her, then, is a judgement which prescribes 'correct' behaviour and is a judgement that serves to institute

boundaries of what can be deemed to be acceptable lesbian practice. The banishing of the lesbian dildo is intended to be a banishing of the 'straight mind'. However, as Butler has repeatedly stressed, any notion of an inside, of a community, depends on a marking of the outside and as such, this outside is, in fact, a constitutive outside, which is then inside. The banished lesbian wielding her dildo, then, is already inside the so-called woman-identified lesbian community, as the refusal of anything that could be read as 'heterosexual'. Moreover, as Butler has also contended, any identification with a position necessitates a prior disidentification enabling that latter identification to be made.[76] To insist that lesbians are not, in any way, 'heterosexual', presupposes that a former identification with heterosexuality has already been made and then disavowed. As such, irrespective of the desire to banish 'straight' from lesbian, 'straight' is always already inside any conception of that position. Could the play here, between the woman with the dildo and the 'passive' woman, be read as an appearing of this constitutive outside, that which makes lesbianism 'possible' but which, as soon as it appears, threatens the stability of that nomination? In which case the absolute separation of heterosexual and homosexual is also troubled? (Of course, this works in the opposite direction too, since the insistence on heterosexual identity can only be constituted through a repressed earlier identification with homosexuality.) Could it be this very threat to the stability of positions that becomes the occasion or scene for this lesbian desire? The desire, then, is an erotic desire produced through transgressing the prohibitions - both heterosexual and lesbian.

I think I could go on forever attempting to 'work' this performance out, attempting to read the sexual exchange and those involved in it, with each attempt leading me further into the maze of gender, sex and sexuality. With each reading it seems possible to cite this performance as an example of a critical appropriation and

redeployment of psychoanalysis, but then each of these readings can be replaced with another which would serve to realign it within a Freudian or Lacanian frame. The performance, then, institutes ambivalence. And maybe this is precisely the point. The 'lesbian' remains unfixed. Yes, I can read her. But I can read her again and again, each time in a different way, as the significations occasioned by this narrative proliferate ceaselessly, all of which are, necessarily, read in relation to *some* frame, whether that be a frame of 'correct lesbianism' or 'woman-identified lesbianism' or 'heterosexual imitation' or 'queer parody' or 'performative resignifications', etc., etc. As Butler has written, 'it is always finally unclear what is meant by invoking the lesbian-signifier, since its signification is always to some degree out of one's control, but also because its *specificity* can only be demarcated by exclusions that return to disrupt its claim to coherence'.[77] As has been witnessed endlessly, all insistences on the specificity of 'a' lesbian identity, that 'quality' or thing presumed to inhere in all those who identify as lesbian, has only met with contestations and refutations. For Butler, 'If it is already true that "lesbians" and "gay men" have been traditionally designated as impossible identities, errors of classification, unnatural disasters within juridico-medical discourses, or, what perhaps amounts to the same, the very paradigm of what calls to be classified, regulated, and controlled, then perhaps these sites of disruption, error, confusion, and trouble can be the very rallying points for a certain resistance to classification and to identity as such.'[78]

The potential of this performance is that, as is to be expected by the prelude to this 'narration' in which the symbol of the 'lesbian' blurs, a blurring which itself provokes multiple readings, the 'meaning' of lesbianism that is promised, is never actually delivered. The meaning is always more than one, and as such, is never simply there. If the meaning of lesbianism, of what a lesbian *is*, remains unfixed, then it

becomes impossible to control and regulate 'her'. Loomis, then, through this narration, conjures a sexuality that is evidently possible but any explanations for it quickly become ungraspable. The Daddy and the narrator are 'lesbian', to the extent that this is an erotic exchange between two women, but within this scene, what each lesbian 'is' and 'means', and the desire that is played out between them, can never be finally settled. The coherence and unity between sex, gender and sexuality - and within sexuality, whether that sexuality be figured as lesbian or heterosexual - is perpetually unsettled.

IGNITING THE SUBJECT

This is not what I meant to write.

How to show you what I saw?

Desire.

Where has the desire within the performance gone? Loomis does not attempt to explain, or theorise, lesbian sexuality, working against her own title. Instead, she 'performs' lesbian sexuality and it is this performance that I watch. That carries me away. That leaves me breathless. The bodies that are conjured in my mind, through her text, are female bodies, desiring bodies, sexual bodies, transgressive bodies, bodies that take up identifications and positions within the sexual act rather than prior to it. Bodies that play, play across, play between: other texts, assumptions, expectations, prescriptions, positions. There's a thrill here. A thrill in the transgression, in occupying 'inappropriate' places, in queering signifying spaces, in not really *knowing* what I see (in my mind) but feeling it, recognising the ambivalences captured within the performance, as the 'Daddy' slips into the (prohibited) father and vice versa, producing in me a *frisson*, occasioned by the multiple possibilities of reinscription, a different inscription and a dissolving. Lost in the text of this performance I experience a certain *jouissance*.[79]

The text is explicit (explicitly erotic?) in its figuring of lesbian sexuality, and that sexuality is raw, passionate, aggressive - this is not the cosy woman-identified-woman love scene that is being played out, nor the desexualised image of the lesbian, but a visceral sexuality in which the unconscious of desire seeps through, performed but unexplained. I see/hear and I do not want explanations. I am moving/being moved too quickly to (want to) understand the desire that is signified within the piece. Instead, I want to feel it. This, then, is desire represented as *effect*. Affecting those in the 'story' and myself. It is a desire which conjures up the existence of lesbians. In the moment I do not read the 'Daddy' as a prohibited desire, or the dildo as a revealing of the heteronormative or patriarchal status of the phallus, but read this desire as desire for and in itself. Here desire can be located in the bottles that clink together, that clink against the glass, the booted foot that connects with the hall floor, making it creak, the leather of the leather jacket creaking as it is shrugged off,[80] the dry scent in the air, the sure grip through the thin silk of the robe, the mouth slamming into mouth, the evening breeze across belly and thighs, the booted foot between two bare feet, the hand on pubic hair, the fistful and the tug. Can you feel it? (What do you see?)[81]

Up to this point in the performance, actual reference to physical sexual activity is absent, but the erotic tension between the connections of materials, their associations and juxtapositions, is palpable and reads as physical. Mixed together in this short scene are aural sounds (clinks, creaks, strides), smells (dry scent, leather - although she does not say she can smell it, when I saw the piece I made that connection in my own nose), textures (leather, silk), contrasts (leather, sure grip, silk robe, boots, bare feet), sensations (breeze). Anticipation is increasingly built up through the interweaving and proliferation of all these different yet erotically connected 'objects'. The effect is that the narrator's nipples go hard. She loses her balance. She is counting her breaths. The

connections impact across the body of the narrator, their inscription evident in the hardened nipples, without the two bodies actually physically connecting. Desire inscribed on the body's surface rather than in its depths.

Later in this scene, when the narrative becomes more sexually explicit, the bodies are still physically separated, as the narrator touches herself, while her lover looks on. The desire, however, is not produced so much from the autoeroticism of this act but from the lovers looking.

> *My hands slide to my hard nipples and begin to tug and twist at them. I don't want to touch my pussy. I want to feel it getting hotter from her watching me and me playing with my breasts. And it is getting hotter as she stands above me and looks down.*

The desire is held in the tense connection between the eyes and the displayed body, rather than the connection between the self-pleasing fingers. Desire unresolved, built up, played between the eyes, marked on the body.

> *I am counting my breaths. Slowly in, slowly out. [...] I feel as if she will take away all my carefully counted breaths. I feel myself lose balance [...] My nipples go hard [...] My ass hits the cushions and a small breath is knocked out of me. [...] Feeling that evening breeze across my wet labia [...] My hips involuntarily jump off the couch like my cunt is trying to jump onto her cock. [...] With a moan I take her in. [...] She [is] stealing my breath in earnest. [...] She [...] shudders big [...] She comes hard [...] My breath slips out in bursts [...] my mind takes off running. [...]*

While the unconscious motivations for these desires remain unexplained, the conscious motivation that is represented here is tangible: she wants to feel the intensity of desire as it moves across different parts of her body - desire for desire's sake, with one desiring effect igniting another until her entire body is aflame with desire and she is left, literally, breathless. The climax is not so much an 'end' however, but the catalyst for another movement, in which she will presumably go from here to somewhere else. *My mind takes off running.*

I catch my breath. My own mind has taken off running. To the proliferating scenes of lesbian desire, which, if ever thought impossible, here, now, seem so very possible, and full of possibilities. Who cares 'why', when the 'doing' is evidently so enjoyable? This enjoyment, the erotic charge evident in the exchange between these two women, is - for this spectator - affirmative. There is nothing 'pathetic' here, no abjected 'others', since the only thing that *is* graspable within the performance is the very real pleasure of these desiring and desired bodies.

CHAPTER 7
MARKS OF OTHERNESS

To those women here who fear the anger of women of Color more than their own unscrutinized racist attitudes, I ask: Is the anger of women of color more threatening than the woman-hatred that tinges all aspects of our lives?

Audre Lorde[1]

OTHER REMARKS

In this chapter I wish to explore the politics of 'race', relating them to performances by 'black' women. The writing of this chapter has been a performance of deferral, as certain anxieties bubble under my white skin. I am scared of saying/writing the wrong thing. In a very real sense, it is this chapter which brings to the forefront of my own consciousness the problematics circulating around identity, subjectivity and difference. I am a white woman and a lesbian. My anxiety suggests that I have unconsciously assumed that I can write 'correctly' (with authority) about white women/lesbian performers - and by that I mean from an 'insider's' position, 'speaking from experience'. My own lived experience, then, pervades my writing even as I write about destabilising it.

But I am different from the white heterosexual female performer, and this difference has not precluded me from writing about her.[2] A recurring theme throughout this thesis has been the heterogeneity of 'woman' - a sign that is crossed with multiple axes of differentiation, including sexuality, race, age, and class. Thus, while I may feel I have something in common with the lesbian performer, that lesbian performer may be black, may be Jewish, may be a lesbian mother, may be a MTF lesbian, may be a differently abled lesbian. At points I may be able to identify with the performer, and at other points I may not.[3] Difference resides within - as well as between - positions of

location. The black woman is still a woman, but the meaning and experience of 'woman' will be inflected and transformed by the racial context (as well as other contexts) - and, similarly, the experience of 'race' will be affected by sexual difference.

It is important that I recognise that while there may be overlappings in our positionings at certain points and in certain discourses, at many times there will be disjunctions. It is politically expedient that a way is found to live with or through these differences, rather than ignoring or excluding them. At times I will be on the margins of the dominant hegemony, with my lesbian companions, at other times I will be in the centre of the dominant hegemony, as a white person. This shifting locationality is recognised by Avtar Brah as '[a] multi-axial performative conception of power'.[4]

Like those marked 'female', those marked as Other than white have their difference simultaneously read off and inscribed on their body.[5] As Rebecca Schneider suggests, 'the imperial white male became culturally and biologically superior to those from whom he *differentiated* himself - the "colored," the colonised, the female. [...] The signatures of primitivity and civilisation have been *inscribed upon the markings of the body*.'[6]

The first requirement of this chapter - choosing the signifier that will designate/position the performers I am writing about - is a step taken hesitantly. What do I mean when I write 'black performer'? Such a designation assumes that 'black' is entirely knowable. How, though, do I know whether someone is 'black' or 'white'? Do I merely presume that our skin tells me the whole story? Is there possibly another story beneath our skin, particularly when one considers, as Peggy Phelan does, that 'the history of slavery for African-American women is also the history of rape'. Arising out of these historical conditions, 'the belief that one is "purely" white or black is difficult to sustain.'[7] It is just such questions that artist Adrian Piper foregrounds in her video

performance, *Cornered* (1988).[8] How do we choose to categorise ourselves - or, more to the point, given the choice how *would* we choose to categorise ourselves - white or black?

A video monitor is placed in a corner of the room. A wooden table, overturned and positioned in front of the monitor, serves to hem it in. Left of the monitor, a birth certificate is framed and hung on the wall. It is Piper's father's birth certificate, and typed in the 'Color' section is the word 'Octoroon'. To the right of the monitor there is an almost identical birth certificate, except this one reads 'Color: White'. Within the frame of the monitor Piper, a pale skinned woman, sits behind a desk, hands clasped in front of her, wearing a blue jumper, pearl necklace, dark hair tied back, pearl earrings. She is official looking, suggestive of a lawyer. She remains calm and consistent throughout, with her hands always clasped in front of her, and her voice unhurried and persuasive, pausing frequently during her speech. She looks straight ahead, out of the monitor, towards the 'audience'.

When the video starts, 'Welcome to the Struggle' appears on the screen. Piper looks out silently. After a moment she says: 'I'm black. Now lets deal with that social fact and the fact of my stating it.' Piper then goes on to 'deal' with the facts - the fact that if the spectator thinks it is unnecessary for her to state this (that she should just 'pass' as white), then they are suggesting white is better than black i.e. no-one would actually *want* to identify as black if they did not have to. The main 'fact' that Piper introduces and pushes throughout the piece, however, is that you - the spectator - might not *in fact* be white, but black.

> If someone who looks and sounds like me can be black, then no-one can safely be white. Researchers have found that 5 - 20% of the population have black ancestry. Most reportedly white Americans are in fact black. If you've been identifying yourself as white then the chances are pretty good that you are in fact black.

Following the stating of such facts, Piper than asks the spectator questions concerning choices - what will you choose to do now that you know you may be black - will you decide to 'pass', will you do nothing, will you tell your friends?

> Or are you just going to think: interesting art experience that bears no relation to real life? Or just another artist trying to put a hoax over on a gullible public? [...] Now you know you're black you too have the option of getting affirmative action [....] Lucky you. Are you going to do it? No? Why not? Think about all the institutional awards you're passing up. [...] This is *not* just an empty academic exercise. This is real. [...] According to the genetic and racial classification of this country, you are probably black [...] If I choose to identify myself as black and you choose white - this is not just a personal problem. This is about us. So, how do you propose we solve it? What are you going to do?

As she asks this last question, Piper looks out at us, silent. The space between myself and her is filled with the phrase 'this is about us'. The 'space between' is the space of our difference. What am *I* going to do?

Of course, on many levels, by suggesting that the spectator - I - am black, Piper can swiftly confront many of the racial stereotypes and prejudices that are displayed within contemporary personal and public discourses - such as, black people are lucky because they receive affirmative action. As Piper suggests, even if I had the opportunity of taking up this affirmative action by stating my black identity, it is unlikely that I would wish to do so, because affirmative action, in reality, does not make racism any more palatable. The pay back is nowhere near big enough. I would still rather 'pass' as white and forego the affirmative action. Similarly, against the common assumption that many artists provoke merely to make it big as an artist, Piper asserts that she would like to know how an artist can make money if all she does is antagonise her audience.[9] And, against the assertion that she is making a 'fuss', Piper argues that a fuss implies that something is being disturbed - in this case, assumptions. 'Perhaps to avoid this disturbance you shouldn't be making assumptions *ever*.'

Aside from confronting these typical reactions, Piper is also foregrounding the impossibility of ever truly knowing what you see - racial identity cannot be read accurately off the skin. Therefore, a 'white' racial identity cannot be securely posited as 'white'. Since it is an advantage in a racist society to be (seen to be) white, those who can 'pass' as white often do, erasing their 'black' identity and history in the process - as Harryette Mullen writes, 'the very conception of whiteness entails the exclusion of blackness.'[10] (One is either white/not-white.) Similarly, the 'pure' white family constitutes itself by 'denying kinship with its nonwhite members, [...] marginalizing its non-European heritages'.[11] Each generation results in a further erasing of this 'black' identity, until one actually becomes 'white', is white, has always been white. In reality, however, 'pure' whiteness or 'pure' blackness is unlikely. Through questioning the spectator about what they will do with this knowledge, this fact, Piper asks us to take responsibility for our actions and choices. If we continue, unaffected, and determined to hold onto our 'pure' white identity, then what are we saying - and continuing to say - about that other part of us, the literal 'other' within ourselves?

My positioning of the 'black performer', then, risks relying on the purely visible. However, the material body that *reads* as black *is* made to bear the effects of that marking in a racist society and such effects need to be acknowledged. While Piper can 'pass' but chooses to actively resist that option, for many such an option is not available.

My choice and use of the term 'black' is also problematic in that it signifies multiply. Like any signifier, whatever one I use to designate these performances will be contingent - offering a certain meaning in a certain context. In Britain, according to Alastair Bonnett:

> It is used, as in America, as a term for people descended from sub-Saharan Africa. It is also ubiquitously employed as a word for this latter group and

> 'Asians' (British definition). A third usage is to equate the term with all people who are not white. Finally, 'Black' is used in anti-racist debate as a political label for those who experience and resist White racism. The fact that four definitions can be supplied is an indication of the fluidity of the meaning of 'black'.[12]

A related problem, however, is that 'black' signifies differently between Britain and the USA. In Britain 'Asian' refers to people of South Asian descent while in America 'Asian' more often reads 'East Asian'. The word 'black' (in terms of Bonnett's third category) in the USA has been replaced with the words 'people of color'. While most of the performers I am going to discuss are 'American' I feel that, since my own writing is located in Britain, it is more appropriate to use the British signification of 'black' rather than 'people of color'.

'Black', like the signifier 'woman', also risks subsuming under the name of the general the particular, reducing and erasing difference through a process of domination and marginalisation. Within the term 'black' there is a danger that, for example, Asian voices (and they too are multiple) become silenced. But, as Avtar Brah comments, the use of the term 'black' in post-war Britain

> cannot be taken to have denied cultural differences between African, Caribbean and South Asian people when cultural difference was not the organising principle within this discourse or political practice. [...] In any case, the issue of cultural difference cannot be posed purely in terms of differences between South Asian and African-Caribbean cultures. There are, for example, many differences between African and Caribbean culture.[13]

Borrowing from Catherine Ugwu in an attempt, I suspect, to borrow her authority, I frame my use of 'black' by citing her position:

> One contentious issue raised many times within this publication is the use of the word black and indeed its spelling. Many terms or expressions could have been used throughout this publication. The general editorial position has been to use the term black (with a lower case *b*) as referring to peoples of African, Asian, South East Asian, Latino (Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban) or Native American descent.[14]

What must be stressed, however, is that whatever 'black' signifies it does not signify some essential racial category (although it may signify, variously and specifically, histories and cultures). As Stuart Hall asserts, although he capitalises the *B*:

> Black is not a question of pigmentation. The Black I'm talking about is a historical category, a political category, a cultural category. In our language, at certain historical moments, we have to use the signifier.[15]

The central question is how one uses the signifier without essentialising it. One way out of this problem is by recourse to a contingent identity, as outlined in the preceding chapters. However, such a practice has come under criticism from post-colonial theorists. Nira Yuval-Davis, for example, suggests that the term 'contingent identity' hides the play of asymmetrical and systemic power relations. She goes on to suggest that although identities may be deliberately 'worn' for strategic political purposes, such categories in fact become reified by both social movements and state policies (for example, 'queer' is in danger of becoming more 'fixed' by the 'queer movement', as suggested in the previous chapter). The contingent, then, becomes static and rigid.[16] In place of strategic essentialism Yuval-Davis suggests a 'transversal politics' - a form of coalition politics that retains 'identity' as the ground on which people can negotiate difference, thus acknowledging the different positionings while refusing to grant any of them '*a priori* privileged access to the "truth"'. Whilst each participant in the dialogue remains rooted to her own identity, such grounding does not prevent her from exchanging dialogue with people from other positions. Additionally, such an exchange does not demand that one loses one's own rooting - instead, one must retain one's own perspective whilst remaining aware and respectful of others. Finally, the aim is not to reduce differences to an indistinguishable mass. 'The transversal coming together should

not be with members of the group *en bloc*, but with those who, in their different rooting, share compatible values and goals to one's own.'[17]

Stuart Hall, recognising the multiple, contingent and diverse make-up of 'identity' likewise suggests some form of coalition politics within a practice whose strategy has shifted from that of manoeuvring to that of positioning. And again, whilst 'identity' is seen as constructed, Hall also stresses that one needs a ground from where one can speak. For Hall, we are all ethnically located, where 'ethnicity' means the place from where we speak, our particular history, experience, and culture.[18] But this ground must not become exclusionary or fixed:

> This is not an ethnicity which is doomed to survive, as Englishness was, only by marginalizing, dispossessing, displacing and forgetting other ethnicities. This precisely is the politics of ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity.[19]

Hall demands that the tension between 'location' or 'position' and 'movement' is kept in place, so that one neither becomes fixed forever in a singular identity, nor liable to continuous, ungrounded sliding. Hall requires us, instead, to live in the tension between 'identity' and 'difference'. It is within the tension that we will live identity through difference:[20]

> One group has to take on the agenda of the other. It has to transform itself in the course of coming into alliance, or some kind of formation with another. It has to learn something of the otherness which created the other constituency. It doesn't mistake itself that it becomes it but it has to take it on board. It has to struggle with it to establish some set of priorities.[21]

What is notable in both of these suggested strategies is that Yuval-Davis and Hall recognise the need for some posited ground to facilitate political action. The subject, here, is not left completely free-floating. 'Identity' (and therefore the signifier 'black') is retained whilst also being questioned. In relation to the destabilisation of the subject, Gayatri Spivak has commented that when white male theoreticians denounce the

existence of the 'subject' they are attempting to denounce the existence of themselves and in so doing they mask their power.[22] Similarly, Stuart Hall, summarising critiques of post-colonialism, writes:

> Sometimes the *only* purpose which the post-colonial critique seems to serve is as a critique of western philosophical discourse, which [...] is like 'merely [taking] a detour to return to the position of the Other as a resource for thinking the Western Self.'[23]

Destabilisation of the 'subject' is no guarantee that the powerful centre will likewise be destabilised and the Other will not be returned to the Same.

The changing political strategies circulating around the (changing) discourses of 'race' are comparable to the shifting discourses of feminism and sexuality that I have already documented. This is not to imply that they are identical since each is the result of particular historical, social, economic and cultural conditions. Nor do I mean to suggest that these others took the lead - in many ways the 'black (Pride)' movement provided the model for other movements. Indeed, the feminist, gay and lesbian movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s arguably took their hope and impetus from (and copied or appropriated the tactics of), the Black Power Movement and Equal Rights Movement of the 1950s.

Both of these movements sought to overturn the negative connotation of the word/colour 'black' by investing it, instead, with positive meanings. This involved a 'return' to a pre-colonial, pre-racist history, a return to a time when people were not oppressed, subjugated, enslaved as a result of their skin colour. In many ways this pre-history is mythical, since links to the 'past' have effectively been demolished by the mechanisms of slavery:

> The homeland is not waiting back there for the new ethnics to rediscover it. There is a past to be learned about, but the past is not seen, and has to be grasped

> as a history, as something that has to be told. It is narrated. It is grasped through memory. It is grasped through desire. It is grasped through reconstruction.[24]

Similarly, like autobiography, the past can never reach us unmediated:

> There can [...] be no simple 'return' or 'recovery' of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present: no base for creative enunciation in a simple reproduction of traditional forms which are not transformed by the technologies and the identities of the present.[25]

One can see the similarity between this 'mythical', invented, or imagined past and the attempt by radical feminists in the 1970s to overturn the negative images of woman by providing in their place an alternative 'woman', a pre-patriarchal woman. What I am asserting, then, is that in both cases, the political strategy adopted was the promotion of some positive attribute that would effectively replace the negative connotations with different, celebratory, ones. However, from the vantage point of 2000, rather than seeing this as merely a misguided move, I would suggest, again, that such an essentialising is understandable and possibly itself essential. This was the necessary first step. As Stuart Hall argues:

> 'Identity Politics One' had to do with the fact that people were being blocked out of and refused an identity and identification within the majority nation, having to find some other roots on which to stand. Because people have to find some ground, some place, some position on which to stand. [...] This is an enormous act of what I want to call imaginary political re-identification, re-territorialization and re-identification, without which a counter-politics could not have been constructed. I do not know an example of any group or category of the people of the margins, of the locals, who have been able to mobilize themselves, socially, culturally, economically, politically in the last 20 or 25 years who have not gone through some such series of moments in order to resist their exclusion, their marginalization. That is how and where the margins begin to speak.[26]

This 're-identification' was a reaction to the stereotypical picture of the 'black' as 'primitive', 'savage', 'uncivilised', 'ignorant', or any of the other various stereotypes in circulation relating to people of 'non-white' ethnicities - with the stereotypes varying

depending on how each of the 'ethnic minorities' was viewed (produced) by the 'majority'.[27]

However, while such re-identifications served to resist the identities given, and offer alternative identities, this strategy was not unproblematic. One set of stereotypes was potentially replaced with another, as an alternative essence was created. The 'emasculated' black man, for example, frequently became the 'black macho'. Women, in turn, were left out of the 'new' picture, along with men who did not want, or were unable, to embody the new macho image. The desired unity behind the Black Power and Equal Rights movements, like the Women's Liberation Movement, belied and denied differences between black people, differences that cut across class, gender, sexuality, caste, and race. The construction of an alternative identity demanded that anything that threatened that identity be suppressed. Moreover, insisting, for example, that the black male subject is 'macho' actually plays into other stereotypical (contradictory) beliefs such as black = primitive passion, and black male = rapist. As Hall comments:

> The essentializing moment is weak because it naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological and genetic. The moment the signifier 'black' is torn from its historical, cultural, and political embedding and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category, we valorize, by inversion, the very ground of the racism we are trying to deconstruct.[28]

Susan Lewis' performance *Walking Tall* (1993),[29] could be cited as an example of such a 'weak' moment, in that the performance charts a shift from a 'noble' pre-colonised black woman to a woman who loses her identity. The performance begins with Lewis standing side-on, centre stage, naked. Her moulded position - upright, head held high, feet facing forward with a slight space between them - and the fact that we see her in profile, suggests extreme power and pride. Watching her, one senses that she is very centred, literally grounded. A recorded soundtrack, at points indecipherable,

occasionally offers up recognisable words. Embedded as they are within otherwise electronically distorted voices, the words stand out in their familiarity. These repeated words form the refrain 'We are powerful, we are beautiful'.

Having maintained this position for some time, Lewis suddenly walks out of it, crosses the stage and begins to dress, putting on shorts and a vest. Once dressed, the previous 'noble and proud' figure disappears into a body racked with fear and uncertainty, a body which takes short hesitant steps across the space, eyes covered with her hands as she does so. She does not seem to know the way. She does not want to know/look. She does not want to see (me)? Be seen? The hesitation is gradually replaced by a sadness and desperation, replayed and repeated endlessly and arduously as her shoulders enact a sobbing gesture and she continuously rolls and unrolls herself up into and from a small ball. Attempting to make herself invisible. She does not like herself? Is not liked? These painful movements are in turn gradually followed by an exploration of her body, as she removes her hands from her face, smiles, and begins to touch her breasts and vagina. Her movements become freer and more expansive. She seems to be touching herself lovingly. Getting back in touch with herself? Suddenly, though, the movements become more regimented and precise as she repeatedly covers her own mouth, vagina, breasts, stomach, bum, in a strict pattern. Love has been replaced with demand, and this demand of/for her body is one that is made over and over again. She then begins to walk across the space, her hands sliding over her face and into her hair, pulling her head back in the process, as if she is being pulled down, pulled into submission, pulled into giving (herself) up. Again, this action of an invisible harmful other is repeated over and over. Lewis then covers her vagina, looking around her anxiously, with the movements becoming more rapid. Suddenly, with a sharp inhalation of breath, she stops, pauses, and then repeats the action, following it this time with a

rapid fall to the ground. She stands up and falls down again, as if she has just been hit, falling into a star shape, her hands moving down to her vagina as she curls once more into a self-protective ball. She undresses again, looks at the audience and walks backwards away from them.

While there is no live text in this performance, the soundtrack of distorted voices is heard throughout, although the only discernible words are those noted earlier. The shifts within the live performance seem to suggest the erasure of the black, proud female body, a space which becomes occupied by the colonised black female body, a body marked with fear, hate and self-hate, pain, and abuse. The putting on of clothes over the previously naked, noble body connotes the so-called 'civilising' of the 'primitive' which, in my description offered above, can only be read as a critique of this term, or a marking of its inappropriateness. In place of the proud black (so-called pre-civilised) body we have the 'civilised' black woman who is located almost diametrically opposite - not proud, but broken, destroyed. At the end of the performance, as Lewis undresses, looks at us, and walks away facing us, there is a sense that she is returning to this previous figure, reclaiming her noble past. This time, however, she keeps her eyes on us. She knows what to expect. She is prepared.

Displaying the pain of the black woman in a colonised (and post-colonial) world, it is not difficult to understand why Lewis should wish to return to some pre-colonial representation of the black woman (just as radical feminists in the 1970s 'returned' to the pre-patriarchal woman). However, such a return is undoubtedly mythical, and the idea of the 'noble savage' is one which was itself conceived within the colonial era. Even this pre-colonial proud woman, then, is a product of a particular historical period, existing within that discourse, as a discursive construct.

Whilst it is understandable that to be able to speak one has to re-create oneself as having the power of speech through returning to a (mythical) past when one did speak, the grounding of one's identity in this past holds within it the danger of fixing it. Such a return does not acknowledge that identity is fluid, that it changes as it is impacted by changing social and historical conditions. Whilst the margins could not 'speak without first grounding themselves somewhere', Hall goes on to ask whether

> they have to be trapped in the place from which they begin to speak? Is it going to become another exclusive set of local identities? My answer to that is, probably, but not necessarily so.[30]

One danger of re-valorising the category 'black' and of continuing to operate within the binary structure of black/white, even when the operation is based on reversal, is that differences within each category will be erased, producing the assumption that all members of that culture speak with the same voice and say the same things. What too frequently happens as a result is that one member of a 'minority community' is held up as the representative of all the members - and that representative tends to be male. Furthermore, institutions - under the guise of multiculturalism - actively seek this 'authentic representative', thereby fixing it in its 'exotic difference' or Otherness. As Yuval-Davis writes:

> These voices are constructed so as to make them as distinct as possible (within the boundaries of multiculturalism) from the majority culture, so as to make them 'different'. Thus, within multiculturalism, the more traditional and distanced from the majority culture the voice of the 'community representative' is, the more 'authentic' it would be perceived to be within such a construction.[31]

A performance that specifically cites this demand for the authentic, or the exotic, is Dee Dee Russell's piece *The Adventures of Art Girl: Insane in San Francisco* (1996).[32] Russell enters the space in an outrageous, eccentric costume comprised of leopard skin patterned suit, blue flowery heels, flowery hat, blue feather boa, carrying a

box of Tide soap powder as a bag. Her costume is a parody of the 'exotic' - she wears a Westernised version of the 'exotic' on her body - feathers on the boa, fake animal skin suit, and a bizarre 'handbag' that is actually a washing powder box - brand name 'Tide' which could signify, parodically, 'nature' or even '(desert) island'. The first words that Russell speaks are 'I don't mind being a little token'. Throughout the rest of the performance, Russell ironically inhabits other stereotypes and misconceptions, playing variations of the 'eccentric exotic' throughout. In one scene, she puts a plastic bag on her head and talks about recycling, while in another she sticks winged sanitary towels onto her suit, and stuffs them down her pants - as a gesture to fertility. These actions could be read off her female body as a parody of 'primitive ritual', or 'radical' or 'eco' feminists. However, this excessive embodying of the stereotypes goes beyond parody by inflating the images to the point of explosion. The 'exotic' is taken beyond the acceptable of difference - and in that beyond, the point of acceptability is marked. I am reminded of Trinh Minh-ha's statement, 'We no longer wish to erase your difference, we demand, on the contrary, that you remember and assert it. At least, to a certain extent.'[33]

A large part of this piece relates to the time when Russell's performances used to be angry. 'And then I got all the grants. Critics love one-dimensional angry art.' Here, then, the 'authentic' black experience was to be 'angry', and the panacea to (or reward of) anger, supposedly, was to receive funding. 'Anger pays.' 'Black' art, to be 'real' black art, had to be angry art. The critics and funders demanded it. If it was not angry, it was not really black. If it was not 'black' it would not be funded. However, by being 'angry', towards white people and towards men, Russell becomes the 'victim' of a hate call:

> Got a telephone call. 'You fucking cunt. Your art sucks and so do you, nigger. You're dead.' I took it seriously. I was acting too bold, too proud. I don't call men bitches anymore. I just think it. I got over it but I didn't really get over it. It changed me.[34]

Russell's piece, then, is infused with a politics of multiple locationality - she is an African-American woman, and both her sexual and racial differences are inscribed onto her body. To be an authentic black artist you have to be angry, but, as Russell found out to her cost, as a black woman you are not allowed to be angry.

At the end of the piece Russell jumps to the year 2000 - 'I am scabbing. 1999 - Michael Jackson paralysed after his last face op. Someone says "Art Girl - you'd look prettier with a whiter shade of cosmetic."' Russell puts on face cream, a sparkly hat and starts dancing to a Michael Jackson song. 'No more confrontational art for me - just good old rock and roll.' This last section offers multiple readings - a critique of the plastic surgery that Michael Jackson has undergone and his motivations for having it done; a critique of the fact that arguably the most successful contemporary popular black performer has both 'whitened' and transformed himself, performing a self-exoticisation by embracing the eccentric and the bizarre, as embodied by his pet monkey, his outrageous clothes and unique dancing style.[35] Finally, this finale makes visible the fact that a woman can only be successful if she avoids 'anger' and confrontational art, while simultaneously wearing the acceptable face of entertainment - one which is not too black.

Perhaps the most unnerving, and unexpected, part of this performance, however, arises at the very end. Following the 'curtain call' and the stage bow, Russell thanks everyone for coming, and for the funders for bringing her here. Since she has spent half of the show (angrily) berating funders and critics for their insistence on 'authenticity in art through anger' I could not help but feel that this, itself, was a double gesture. Sincere? Ironic? Sincerely ironic? Ironically sincere?[36]

Working within the white/black binary is problematic in another way. Without denying that black people in a racist society or culture have distinct and real experiences as a result of the negative inscription of their skin colour, 'race' is itself constructed in discourse. Merely reversing the meanings of black and white does not dislodge the binary opposition that is at work - both remain dependent on each other for meaning, and the new 'positive' image of 'black' is no nearer any 'truth' of 'blackness'. There is no 'race', as we know and experience it (and we do *really* experience it), outwith or beyond discourse. Thus, 'black' and 'white' and their different significations are the effects of various aligned and competing discourses. Both are discursively constructed, and the effects of such construction are dependent on their separation. 'Black' means what it means only because of its necessary relation to 'white' - or rather, 'white' needs 'black' to mean specific things. Thus, if black is constructed within discourse as 'primitive', 'uncivilised', 'ignorant', etc., then locating it within a binary opposition of white/black produces 'white' as civilised, cultured, educated, etc. The inscription of 'black' as negative enabled colonisers to justify colonisation and the expansion of the Empire within a discourse of emancipation and development - 'for the good of the Natives'.[37] As Catherine Hall argues that 'The colonies provided the benchmarks which allowed the English to determine what they did not want to be and who they thought they were'. That is, 'Men were made white by the Empire in a way that was never articulated "at home".'[38] 'Whiteness', then, is the result of the discursive production of 'blackness', and has no 'origin' in itself. It is by seeing this 'Other' that the One sees her/himself, and it is against this Other that one's identity is repeatedly constructed and confirmed. 'White' necessarily contains within it the inscription of black and can never therefore be 'pure'.

The notion of a separate 'Britain' likewise suggests a selective memory. As Stuart Hall comically and astutely asks:

> what does anybody in the world know about an English person except that they can't get through the day without a cup of tea? Where does it come from? Ceylon. Sri Lanka, India. That is the outside history that is inside the history of the English. There is no English history without that other history. The notion that identity has to do with people that look the same, feel the same, call themselves the same, is nonsense.[39]

Susan Lewis' performance, *Ladies Falling* (1995),[40] directly reflects Hall's comment. The performance begins with a voice-over in which a female voice states:

> About a year ago, a very pompous, middle-aged, white man said to me 'You're more British than the British themselves'. I thought to myself, who does he think the British are? Who does he think are this great British nation? Closing my eyes, I come into the darkness, seeing the prize, the symbol of the British Empire, the Lady. The Lady that haunts. Stepping into her shoes, I journey back in time.

Entering into the space wearing a Victorian gown, with her hair pinned up, Lewis literally steps into the shoes of this colonial symbol and begins to strip it away, revealing its fictional status. Contextualised by other colonial symbols - tea, sugar and rum - Lewis performs the Lady as bored, demanding and childish. Sitting at a table with a teapot and cup, the Lady plays mindless games such as throwing teaspoons of sugar into the air and trying to catch them again. Similarly, when the Lady wants someone to take away her tea-cup, rather than waiting for a response she holds the cup out, sighs impatiently, and lets it fall to the ground. On a screen behind the performer, an image of a falling tea-cup is repeated over and over again, underscoring the common nature of this occurrence. In the background, the indicatively English song 'In an English Country Garden' is playing. However, as the performance continues, the notes become distorted, mirroring the 'collapse' of the fictional image of the so-called Lady.

By embodying the figure of the Lady but refusing to represent the myth, Lewis reveals that the construction of such a figure relies on the counter-construction of the black woman, particularly the 'black mama' figure. As the Lady swans about in her fine

clothes, sipping tea, the black woman works endlessly to 'keep' the Lady 'refined'. unsullied by work and domestic chores. While the Lady (Lewis) sips tea, a projected film image shows a montage of 'black mamas' sweeping, washing, scrubbing on hands and knees, with an interweaving of black female voices, stating over and over again 'working and working, cleaning and working, over and over, it never seems to stops, over and over, working and working [...]'. When the Lady invents games with the sugar or drops her tea-cup, it is the Other who will clean up after her. Only by constructing the black woman as the worker, the domestic, can the Lady be positioned as 'refined', although this picture of refinement is parodically and ironically undercut in Lewis' performance.

Lewis' appropriation of this symbolic figure is transgressive and the clash between her colour and the mythically inscribed symbol inevitably sets up a frisson. The black woman inhabiting the space of the 'Lady' serves to reveal the extent to which this figure is culturally imagined and inscribed as white. The Lady cannot be black since no space for such a position is available within colonialist discourse. It is an impossibility. However, this inhabiting of a white space by a black body also enables a dialogue between colonised and coloniser within the one space. The black body of Lewis confronts the white body of colonial history, specifically the white female body, since in this performance both places are inhabited by the performer. (Lewis' movements also suggest the figure of the ballerina, and again a tension is produced by the fact that this ballerina is black, foregrounding that the conceptual space of the ballerina is similarly inscribed as white.)

What also surfaces, however, is that the Lady is also constricted by her construction as a 'prize'. When she takes her cup of tea, she pours alcohol into it; as an adult she reminisces about her childhood when she was free to run in the fields - before

she became the 'colonial lady'. In the performance Lewis removes the Victorian dress layer by layer, revealing that each layer effectively produces the Lady - controlling her posture and movements, the way she sits, walks, dances. One is not born a lady but becomes one...

While Lewis reveals the necessary relationship between the Lady and the black woman, she simultaneously reveals that both are equally essential to the maintenance of the colonial system. Neither woman is therefore 'free', but each is specifically produced to take up a place in colonial discourse, reinforcing its power in the process. The Lady cannot be a Lady without her opposite. Her identity, then, is as much constructed by what she is not, as what she is.

In this post-colonial era of globalisation it is far from simple to define national or cultural identity (if indeed it ever was straightforward, since nations and culture have never been strictly 'pure').[41] 'Belonging' exceeds any notion of the singular, whether it be of race, culture or nation (and other social positionings and identifications that are outwith the concept of 'origin' but related to it, such as sexuality). Cultures and histories cross and interlock, affecting both sides of the 'boundaries' as people move across the globe in diasporic formations. This is not a one-way street, where, for instance, black people become more 'British' - in the Powellist sense of the term - through a form of cultural assimilation (although for the majority never fully 'British', since the 'non-whiteness' of their skin would preclude that). Cross-overs occur in both directions, with 'Britain' being impacted and affected by both cultural clashes and cultural mergers - mergers that produce something new, rather than the domination of one culture (the majority) over another (the minority) or the subsumption of the Other into the One. As Stuart Hall writes:

> Third generation young Black men and women know they come from the Caribbean, know that they are Black, know that they are British. They want to speak from all three directions.[42]

To speak from all three directions implies not speaking from just one at any particular time. What it suggests instead is an interaction and exchange between all locations that produces something 'new'. This new is defined by the term 'hybrid', referring, in Hall's writing, both to the process of interaction and the forms of identity that are generated as a result of such exchanges. Homi Bhabha uses the notion of hybridity, not to indicate some process of accumulation, whereby 'essences' of identity are combined, but as something else besides either of the two 'original' identities. The hybrid, then, exists in what Bhabha has termed the 'Third Space' - the place where meaning becomes translated in the passage from One to the Other. As translation is never truly 'successful', meaning necessarily becomes changed in this process, belonging therefore neither to the One nor the Other, but becoming something else quite different. The existence of the hybrid, then, signals the failure of language to be present to itself, as the signs in the space of translation 'can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew'.[43] Bhabha goes on to suggest that within translation there are always seeds of the 'untranslatable' - the foreign - which serves to split the previously perceived unity of 'skin and fruit':

> Unlike the original where fruit and skin form a certain unity, in the act of translation the content or subject matter is made disjunct, overwhelmed and alienated by the form of signification. [...T]hrough this dialectic of cultural negation-as-negotiation, this splitting of skin and fruit through the agency of foreignness, the purpose [...] is not 'to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German' [but] instead to turn German into Hindi, Greek, English.[44]

The impact of 'black' music, for instance, can be heard and felt throughout the British music scene and particularly within the club culture where rap and jungle are popular dance forms. However, it is not possible to say that either this club rap or jungle are in

any way authentically 'black' (indeed, what would such a thing sound like?), or authentically 'British'. Rather, they are specific cultural products of a particular time and place - a place informed, nonetheless, by a particular history. In a sense, then, jungle music could be said to be both 'Black and British', neither one nor the other, nor a combination of the two - but something different.

Multiple locationality is a recurring trope within many performances by black women. Maya Chowdhry's piece, *The Sacred House* (1993),[45] for instance, specifically examines the multiple axes of Asian, Scottish, lesbian and woman as each identity crosses each other across her body. Using multiple layerings of slides, text, movement, fabrics and projected images that mirror the multiple positionings of the performer, it is impossible to locate Chowdhry as 'simply' Asian, or Scottish, or lesbian or female - the intersection of all four locations prevents any neat definition, blurring any concept of hermetically sealed identities or categories. Each location is inflected, and therefore affected, by the impact of other locations. Chowdhry is Asian and Scottish and lesbian and female, but her Asianness will be affected by her Scottishness and her Scottishness affected by her Asianness and her femaleness will be affected by her lesbianness, and her lesbianness will affect her experience of being Asian and Scottish, and so on. Each location, then, impacts the shape of the others and the experiences that Chowdhry experiences are specific to that multiple locationality. Chowdhry cannot isolate each aspect of her identity because her 'identity' *is* the product of all of these simultaneously occupied locations. It cannot be separated out. Thus, her Scottishness is an Asian Scottishness - as well as a female and lesbian Scottishness. Additionally, however, as an Asian Scot, Chowdhry alters others perceptions of Scottishness - of what that signifies. 'Scottishness' can no longer be based on the claim of 'pure' origin or culture. The same

is true of Asian and lesbian as these positions negotiate with each other and all other positions.

In a similar form to Chowdhry's performance, Margaret Nelson, in *Pretty for a Dark Girl* (1995),[46] repeats the refrain:

> In search of my voice, I will be in search of my voice, I will hear me in search of my voice, I'm a female in search of my voice, I'm black in search of my voice, I am female in search of my voice, I am black female or female black, I'm a black female and female black African American African American African American Caribbean American in search of my voices.

The singular 'voice' becomes multiple 'voices' by the end of the refrain. The hybrid identity poses a threat to the notion of a unified, stable national location or nationalist History and Truth. However, as Nelson's performance suggests, the difficulty lies in finding a way to speak this plurality, of being able to speak in a multilingual tongue, where that multiplicity is not silenced by any internal (or external) dominant voice.

Performances such as Chowdhry's and Nelson's indicate that there are differences within and that multiple experiences and subjectivities are located within the term 'black'. One is never 'only' black.

Another frequently witnessed strategy displayed within performances is a performed resistance towards being hemmed in by singular definitions - or the impossibility of definitions capturing 'real' lived subjectivity. In Julie Tolentino's *Mestizo - Que Bonitos Ojos Tienes* (1998),[47] for example, one section of the performance consists of Tolentino being asked a series of quick-fire questions, all of which are to do with 'who are you?' In many instances, the questions do not allow for flexibility or instability, requiring short, ready made answers, or a simple 'yes' or 'no': 'Describe yourself.' 'For the record, who exactly are you?' Tolentino can rarely answer the questions successfully, within the allocated time, and frequently gets cut off mid-

sentence, or struggles to find an adequate answer, or appears to diverge from the question. Tolentino, a dyke of Filipino/El Salvadorian descent, originally from San Francisco, cannot answer such questions easily, since the questions do not allow for a complicated or multiple sense of subjectivity. The questions are like the boxes that one has to tick - sex, gender, nationality, race - boxes which leave no room for multiple intersections of difference.

In a very real sense, black women are always located as doubly 'othered' - that is. as women and as black. When they speak they do so from (at least) two places at the same time. The black female is 'plural' and therefore performs internal dialogues with herself - with the 'others' inside herself - as a *black* woman talking to a black *woman*. Mae Gwendolyn Henderson has suggested that this doubled positioning enables black women writers to speak from within identifications and across differences:

> What is at once characteristic and suggestive about black women's writing is its interlocutory, or dialogic, character, reflecting not only a relationship with the 'other(s),' but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of the self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity. The interlocutory character of black women's writings is, thus, not only a consequence of a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or 'generalized Other,' but a dialogue with the aspects of 'otherness' within the self. The complex situatedness of the black woman as not only the 'Other' of the Same, but also as the 'other' of the other(s) implies [...] a relationship of difference and identification with the 'other(s)'.[48]

The 'dialogic' is Bakhtin's term for the propensity within language for a dialogue or verbal exchange. In the dialogic view of language, each word spoken is 'interpenetrated' by others' words or utterances. That is, the word spoken always takes into consideration another speaker's word. The word, then, is not only a signifier signalling a referent but is continuously engaged in dialogue. However, one does not need to have an external interlocutor to experience the dialogic nature of words, since the individual engaged in thought is necessarily having a dialogic relation to her/his 'inner

speech' by dividing her/himself in two. The speaker is both the subject and object of speech: 'By objectifying myself... I gain the opportunity to have an authentically dialogic relationship with myself.' The 'other' then, may be the self. As Henderson states, the internal, consciousness, 'becomes a kind of "inner speech" reflecting "the outer word" in a process that links the psyche, language, and social interaction.'[49]

As black women are positioned by both race and gender, the words that they use will stage a literal dialogue between these two locations, enabling them to speak in dialogical voices 'to the other(s) both within and without'. The 'other(s)' within the self are not denied then, but are used to conduct creative dialogues across differences.

Henderson goes on to cross this notion of the dialogic of difference with Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'dialectical model of conversation', or *dialectic of identity*, in which the black woman *identifies* with the locations of others 'who share a common history, language, and culture'.[50] The dialectic of identity is not based on the contestations that occur in language as heteroglossia interact, but instead 'presupposes as its goal a language of consensus, communality and even identification, in which "one claims to express the other's claims[...]".'[51] This expressing of the other, then, is simultaneously an expressing of the I.

Although Henderson's concept of this doubled mode of language inhabited by the black woman is specifically concerned with the black female writer, her insight can be usefully transferred to performance art. First, it is likely that the performer relies on inner dialogue to construct the performance piece, and that this process will display the same simultaneous movement of a dialogic of difference and a dialectic of identity as outlined by Henderson. Moreover, in the actual presentation of the performance, it is possible to suggest that such simultaneous enunciations are visible, as the multiple locations of the performer are foregrounded within the actual performed text. Alongside

this projection of the difference within - the internalised others - there exists a point of identification of the same.

Such a process of dialogics and dialectics can already be observed in Maya Chowdhry's performance cited earlier in which her multiple locationality enables a dialogue of difference, between her location as Other (in my reading figured racially) and her other others - her lesbianism, her gender, and her nationality all enter into a dialogue with each other, as well as with her location as Asian. Similarly, I identify with some of Chowdhry's locations, but this identification must be negotiated through her difference from me, her Scottish, lesbian, female *'Asianness'*. In Pamela Sneed's performance *Imagine Being More Afraid of Freedom than Slavery* (1994),[52] Sneed talks to me as a *dyke*, talks to straight women as a *woman*, talks to straight black women as a *black woman*, talks to black men as a *black* woman, talks to gay men as a *dyke*, talks to bisexuals as a *dyke*. But she also talks to black men as a *woman*, to straight women as a *dyke*, to straight white women as a *black dyke*, to white dykes as a *black* dyke, etc. She simultaneously aligns herself with and against every spectator, finding both a point of connection with and a distance from each person. Crucially, the connections form the bridge across differences. As critic Barbara Christian writes, in relation to Audre Lorde:

> As a black, lesbian, feminist, poet, mother, Lorde has, in her own life, had to search long and hard for *her* people. In responding to each of these audiences, in which a part of her identity lies, she refuses to give up her differences. In fact she uses them, as woman to man, black to white, lesbian to heterosexual, as a means of conducting creative dialogue.[53]

As Kobena Mercer asserts, such dialogism shows that 'black identities are plural and heterogeneous and that political divisions of gender and sexual identity are to be transformed as much as those of race and class'.[54] If the others are also within then the absolute binaries One/Other, or white/black are destabilised, as 'black' becomes

heterogeneous and diverse, rather than fixed and essentialised or established in relation to another homogenised and fixed Other (One).

1995: BLINDED BY (MY OWN) POLITICS

In 1995 I saw the performance *America, the Beautiful*, at the ICA in London. Shortly after witnessing it I wrote the following:

> [The performer] takes transformation to a [...] painful level by attempting to transform her body into an image of Marilyn Monroe. To do this, she takes a roll of thick Sellotape and proceeds to tape up her flesh, thus narrowing her waist and her thighs. The constrained, manipulated body is a body in pain; a body trying to fit into the template [of the projected image of the 'perfect body']. In this action [the performer] has embodied so-called female strategies of dieting, plastic surgery and the wearing of shape-altering clothing - attempts to contort or change the body into a shape that is not its own.[55] She continues with this transformation by over making-up her face with lipstick and powder and wearing a blonde wig, sprayed with an entire can of hairspray to 'hold/fix' it in place. The end result is a grotesque parody of Marilyn Monroe struggling to remain on high-heeled shoes which hardly hold her frame - which may be a more truthful representation of the 'real' Monroe than the perpetuated sex-idol one.[56]

Irrespective of some worrying suggestions contained within my writing, such as the notion of a 'truthful representation', two and a half years after the event I still maintain that this is basically what the performer does. However, I have strategically omitted information here. The performer's name is Nao Bustamante. Does this not alert and alter simultaneously? Although American, as indicated in the programme by the '(USA)' that follows her name, Bustamante is of Latin American descent, being of second generation Mexican-American parents.[57] This is not only an imitation of a blonde icon.

When I saw this performance I completely erased Bustamante's 'difference' in the process. I read the performance as being feminist, as being a critique about the pressures of women to conform to stereotypes of femininity, when such stereotypes are impossible to achieve - at least without a great deal of effort (not to mention pain and

discomfort). What I saw was a woman critiquing patriarchal ideology which positions women as objects to be looked at. Through Bustamante, I saw only my own resistance to adopting the iconography of Marilyn Monroe - constructed representation of femininity extraordinaire. In a sense, then, I heard or recognised only those parts of the performance that talked my own language, that met me at my place, that knew where I was coming from. My personal sight/site lines were monodirectional. I saw only what I needed to, wanted to. My feminism had become tunnel visioned - sexual difference at the expense of everything else. The prophecy depicted by Mae Gwendolyn Henderson that 'the "critical insights" of one reading might well become the "blind spots" of another reading' had, in this case, rung true:

> That is, by privileging one category of analysis at the expense of the other, each of these methods risks setting up what Frederic Jameson describes as 'strategies of containment,' which restrict or repress different or alternative readings.[58]

And yet now, re-playing the memory of the performance in my mind, I find it unbelievable that I could have ignored the 'racial' implications of the performance. However, perhaps this 'blindness' on my part could indicate the slippery nature of the signifier 'black'. In Britain, those designated as Latin American are 'seen' to be 'white' (Spanish) rather than 'black'. Acknowledging, here, Bustamante's inscribed 'Otherness' am I now in danger of fixing her difference through positioning her as Latin American? Bustamante is not, in fact, Latin American, but a citizen of the United States of America. However, if I insist on Bustamante's Americanness at the cost of the difference which is culturally inscribed on and through her flesh, a difference which impacts in a very real sense the one who wears the marked skin - then I am guilty of race blindness - a sort of inverted racism. Similarly, Bustamante has a particular cultural history and to erase this is to erase her Mexican roots. Yet the roots of her childhood are not simply Mexican

since her access to the 'Mexican' is inseparable from the 'American' as her parents are second generation Mexican-Americans. Bustamante has no direct experience of 'being Mexican'. But what does 'being Mexican' mean? Does one need to have been in Mexico to 'be' Mexican? (Equally, what does 'being American' mean?)

My attempts to write about Bustamante foreground the difficulty in positioning her comfortably anywhere and the ambiguous nature of this piece. She is neither Mexican nor American, as she is both Mexican and American, but neither purely (whatever that is). Bustamante is the offspring of hybrid parents who were the offspring of hybrid parents. What does that make her? A hybrid hybrid hybrid? A third generation hybrid? As a hybrid Bustamante pushes at the boundaries of both 'Americanness' and 'Mexicanness' questioning our assumptions of belonging and identity in the process - while also making us aware of the danger of erasing the 'grounds' completely. If I erase Bustamante's 'Latin American' ground what happens? She 'becomes', in my eyes, white. This, then, is the specific danger of deconstructive moves around 'race' - too often they result in a partial deconstruction which erases 'black' (culture, history), while reinforcing 'white'.

Moreover, Bustamante is more than Latin American, more than black, more than Mexican, more than American. She is also a woman. Her 'self', then, is produced, crossed with and impacted by all of these positions and more. Another danger lies in foregrounding 'race' and erasing all other positions, making Bustamante stand in for race, as its representative. But, returning full circle, if I do not acknowledge the racial and cultural difference between us, then do I perform a cultural indifference, reading Bustamante's body merely as a tool to be wielded by my hands against 'patriarchy'?

How to read this text without uncritically or unconsciously returning it to 'me' or essentialising our difference? As noted earlier, the performance offers multiple readings,

just as - and perhaps because - Bustamante herself is multiply located. Moreover, the initial reading, produced during my witnessing of the performance, is only one reading that I will undertake. After the event, I undertake other readings, staging a dialogue with myself (and my others?), between what I saw and what I went on to see. This performance highlights, then, the impossibility of meaning residing singularly within the text. The first reading that I offered was a reading dependent on what I brought with me, into the space of the performance. My interpretation was dependent upon my own location, upon my own interpretative tools which, at the time of that reading, were white feminist tools. However, this reading is neither 'wrong' nor unproductive for what it enables is a later reading of my reading, resulting in a greater self-consciousness of what I read, and why I read what I read - that is, my own spectatorial location, and the exclusions that such a fixed location performed.

This ambiguity within the performance, the lack of a 'right' reading, could be seen to be a deliberate performance strategy which seeks to pose questions rather than attempt to suggest answers. As Coco Fusco has suggested about her work with Guillermo Gómez-Peña, '[We] use our presence as a catalyst for discussion by other people rather than our presenting some sort of rational discourse. [It's] not just us telling you, but what *you* think, see.'[59]

Seeing again, attempting to see differently as a result of my awareness of the operations of both production and exclusion within my first reading, I return to this performance to reread it. Such rereadings will, undoubtedly, provide the stage for further dialogues with my future selves and interrogations of previous I's.

The first rereading that I offer to myself is that the woman attempting to transform herself into an image of Marilyn Monroe is not only trying to achieve the body of Monroe, but is also trying to be(come) white like Monroe through hiding her own

skin colour. The white face powder, the blonde wig, and the Sellotape are all therefore part of an attempt to cross from 'black' to 'white' - to embody the white skin of the famous white female icon. (Black Skin, White Mask?) Bustamante's critique, then, comes from a different place than my own. Not only does she not have that 'perfect' female body, but she also has the wrong skin colour since the desirable body within Westernised culture has been constructed as the white body.

Through putting on the accoutrements of the desired female body, it could be said that Bustamante is mimicking white femininity. Her performance, then, is a literalisation of what Homi Bhabha has termed 'colonial mimicry' - the process by which the Other is produced as '*almost the same, but not quite*'.[60] The 'not quite' within colonial mimicry is that which ensures 'difference', therefore producing and maintaining the identity of the One. The skin of the Other is marked as excessive, so that 'not quite' becomes 'not white'. Bustamante is not the 'real' Marilyn Monroe (her skin prevents her taking up the position of the 'real thing') but merely a mimic.

However, this mimicry is performed with a twist. It is not primarily Bustamante's skin which prevents her from assuming the place of the 'real Monroe', but her excessive performance of white femininity. The racial 'excess' that blocks access to the place of the 'real', then, is displaced onto the act of *excessively* miming this real - of excessively making up as the white feminised body. Importantly, this excess is produced *by* Bustamante within the act of mimicking, rather than being inscribed *onto* her (skin). The difference is a difference of her own making. This mimicry, then, is a parodic mimicry. Bustamante is not attempting to *be* Monroe since she deliberately exceeds that location.

Moreover, what is suggested in this excessive mimicry is the fact that white femininity is also always a mimicking, without an original. Monroe, 'herself', is

(literally) made-up, a copy of a copy. Thus, one cannot strictly say that Bustamante is *not* the 'real' thing, or that she is a bad copy of the original, because hers is a parodic copy of a copy without an original. Bustamante cannot be the 'real' thing because there is no real thing. Monroe, then, is no more 'real' than Bustamante's imitation of Monroe, since Monroe is herself an imitation of an already inscribed femininity, which, through excessive circulation and consumption has become a hyperreal (and therefore impossible) femininity. It is not just that Bustamante's skin or flesh is in excess of the image, but that the image is already excessive.

It is through the 'black' that the actual masquerade of white femininity is revealed all the more profoundly. As the black body is strapped up, strapped down, strapped in, and the flesh is whitened, and the hair disguised, the extent to which the iconography of desired femininity is 'made up' is foregrounded. Both the construction and inscription of that white femininity are highlighted by being worn by an inappropriate body. Nao Bustamante presents us with a parody of Marilyn Monroe but by playing it across her black body is able to foreground the performance as a performance - masquerading the masquerade. As the masquerade is performed by and across the inappropriate body, the performance also reveals the narrow parameters of the appropriate.

There is something obvious within this performance that needs to be remarked. Bustamante, a 'black' woman, is (not) attempting to embody a *white* female icon. What is partially highlighted in this act is the gap between 'icon' and 'black'. There are few female Latin American icons in circulation in Western popular culture (which is not to say that they are not in circulation in Latin America. However, as bell hooks has pointed out, historically, even within 'black' culture - as a subconscious incorporation of white racism - the less dark body was often deemed to be more attractive.[61]) Bustamante's performance, then, is more than a critique of representations of women. It is also a

critique of the fact that the majority of popular representations in circulation in the West are of white female Westerners.[62] But I am again in danger of refixing Bustamante's difference through insisting on her difference as Latin American when she is in fact a citizen of the United States of America. An alternative - but related - reading, then, is that this is a critique of 'Americanness', that the representation of Monroe as *the* 'American female' is racist in that it suggests that the most (or only) desirable American female is a white one. Finally, could Bustamante's mimicking of Monroe be read as an example of the hybridity that the performer herself inhabits - both Mexican and American - the Mexican Monroe or the American Mexican? Gómez-Peña has discussed the potential for problematising racial and ethnic stereotypes by hybridising them, which in his terms refers to' imbu[ing] the stereotype with so much cultural information [that] you create a composite image that is so hybrid and complex that [it] challenges all the perceptions, all the coded perceptions of the viewer [....]'[63] However, the reading of Bustamante's performance of Monroe as being an example of such hybridity is foreclosed in my mind by the fact that I do not see a composite image as much as an inhabiting of a (Western) stereotype, in which Bustamante exaggeratedly steps 'into' Monroe rather than transforming her into something else.

Additionally, I would suggest that by refusing to inhabit a 'black' stereotype the possibility of that stereotype being reinscribed is lessened. However, the danger of Bustamante stepping 'into' Monroe and wearing an excessive disguise, is that Bustamante becomes invisible (to me). What my own initial blindness would suggest, then, is that the spectator habitually performs a resolution of ambiguity, reading only that which is already known. As I hope I have shown here, ambiguity of meaning is hugely productive, enabling an active encounter with the spectating self and the process of seeing. If such a dialogue takes place after the performance event then the event has

indeed been a catalyst. Perhaps what is required, though, is that the spectator be prepared to see differently (and I speak of myself here) - learning to look dialogically for the different at the same time as I see the similar, so that I can see from a different place and hear other languages being spoken at the same time as I hear my own. In short, the spectator has a responsibility to become nothing less than multilingual.

However, the danger residing within a concept of multilingualism is that difference can as easily be reduced to the Same as the domination of One over the Other is performed; while one may learn to speak another language this does not ensure a communication *across* difference but may actually aid in the appropriation of the Other. In their performance, *Stuff* (1996),[64] Nao Bustamante and Coco Fusco reveal this danger of the multilingual. The performance centres around the booming global tourist industry, in which the 'exotic' is (made and) marketed specifically for Western travellers. Through parodic performance, Fusco and Bustamante inhabit Western stereotypes of the racially marked Other, specifically the black female eroticised Other. In full view of the audience, they transform themselves (via wigs, costumes and fake accents) into 'authentic' Latin American women and aim to transport the 'tourist' to a sensual, foreign world.

What is foregrounded in the performance, aside from the commercial production and packaging of the 'foreign', designed to make it palatable for Western consumption, is the interconnection of tourism and sex - the fact that sex sells, particularly the sex of the 'dark' woman. The language that the tourist learns in the performance is the language of negotiating sexual transactions, of owning a piece of the 'exotic' woman, rather than negotiating difference without merely appropriating it. Difference again returns to the Same and woman is reinscribed as an object for (white, heterosexual male) consumption.

Moreover, there actually *is* no so-called 'difference' since difference has already been produced as the Same, as the 'exotic woman' is literally 'made up' to appeal to Western tastes and fantasies. The 'authentic' then is nothing more than a figure of Western male desire. And the 'dark skinned sexually available' woman is a performance put on and necessitated by the need to survive in a context in which the sex industry remains one of the most (and often the only) lucrative options open to many women. Sex becomes a global language and a global currency in a global market dominated by the white, male Westerner. As Judy, a prostitute whose voice is heard within the performance, states:

> When I feel down, I start thinking about a new way to fix my hair. The Italians like wild hair, so I permed mine [....] We have to eat, right?

Dialogue is impossible without a contract being undertaken on both sides to enter into it. The question that keeps surfacing, though, is how do we prevent such dialogue slipping back into a monologue? How to resist the continual returning of difference to the Same, the continual performing of power by One over an/Other? How to live with and through difference? As performer Anna Deveare Smith writes:

> Few people speak a language about race that is not their own. If more of us could actually speak from another point of view, like speaking another language, we could accelerate the flow of ideas.[...] If we were able to move more frequently beyond those boundaries, we would develop multifaceted identities and we would develop a more complex language. After all, identity is in some ways a process towards character. It is not character itself. It is not fixed. Our race dialogue desperately needs this more complex language.[65]

Destabilising identity - as the performers cited in the second section of this thesis have consistently shown - is perhaps one way to induce this more complex language.

CONCLUSION
TRAFFIC LIGHTS

At the end of the day, at the beginning of the (next) day, it comes back to this:

Two thoughts: there is no liberation that only knows how to say 'I'. There is no collective movement that speaks for each of us all the way through.

Adrienne Rich[1]

AMBER: ME

A common experience shared by researchers when conducting their study is that every thesis is potentially infinite (and this one is no different) - but the full stop must be placed somewhere, even if only momentarily. Having reached the 'end' of this thesis, however, I realise it is not so much an 'end' as another beginning, or at least a gateway to continuation.

The production of research, on the scale of that required for a PhD thesis, is a *process* located in time and (personal, emotional, intellectual) space. As time passes, space changes.[2] While such shifts are perhaps not inappropriate in a thesis which aims to map shifts, they do problematise the process of writing, since active thought does not obey the full stop. Simply put, I doubt I am the same person I was when I wrote Chapter 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, or 7 and it is unlikely that I will be the same person who wrote this at the time of your reading it. The only way I could attempt to keep pace with my own shifts would be to keep rewriting my words and thoughts, which, having reached the 'end' again, would undoubtedly have reshifted, returning me to the 'beginning'. Wishing to avoid this continual repetition and impossible chasing of my own tail (not to mention the necessity of actually submitting my thesis) I position this 'conclusion' as a sign of where I am now (in relation to where I might have been previously), and where I

intend to go next. Ironically, having spent several years following different permutations of this route, I find myself forced to a halt by a return of the terms 'feminist politics' and 'feminist performance art'. The spaces *in-between* 'destabilisation' and 'contestation', 'ground/ed' and 'Ground', 'self' and 'Self', 'presence' and 'Presence' have made themselves felt. Caught up in the sometimes contagious exhilaration of shifting and contingent subjectivities (shifts and contingencies which, I maintain, are still politically important), I was unaware, until reaching this 'end', of those significant spaces beginning to open up.

RED: WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE ART AND FEMINIST POLITICS

At Performance Studies International 5 (Aberystwyth, April 1999), Robert Ayers, in a panel presentation, asked 'What is performance art for?', itself a variation (and avoidance) of the older question, 'What is performance art?' In Ayers' question the debate around categorisation (and the 'existence' of performance art) is displaced onto determining the 'function' of performance art. However, such a question assumes that there is *one* function, and that this function, whatever it is, remains constant throughout 'history'. As explicated in Chapter 1, I believe that performance art has always had more than one function. Equally, who would determine what it is that performance art is for: the artist, the critic, the spectator, the historian? Attempting to avoid prescriptives, I seek to substitute Ayers' question with another: 'What, potentially, does or can performance art do?' Any answer to this question must necessarily locate performance art pieces within their own historical and cultural contexts, since what they 'do' will be dependent on where they are placed. Equally, the 'do' will be plural - do for the performer, the spectator, society, women, feminism... While I have suggested differences between performance art produced by women in the 1970s and contemporary

performance art, neither of these strategies should be 'judged' outwith their contexts, since it is these contexts that determine the specific challenges made. The strategies utilised in both cases are appropriate to the contexts from which they arose.

Thus, embedded within the newly burgeoning Women's Liberation Movement, much women's performance art of the 1970s entered into the struggle to improve women's situation in society, utilising a number of strategies to do so. Amongst these were celebrations of 'natural' femininity (pitted against an 'aggressive' and 'destructive' masculinity), the revealing of the untenable position women held in society (intended as a corrective to those images of women produced by men), the creation of spaces intended to provide support and to nurture women's creativity, the revalorisation of women's aesthetic 'forms', and the forging of artistic communities with shared aims. What is suggested by these activities is that in the 1970s (viewed from the late 1990s), feminism was relatively 'uncomplicated'. As a new 'liberation movement' its aims seemed simple - the liberation of all women.

The fragmentation of the feminist movement, however, reveals that the story becomes more complex as the movement 'develops', with critiques arising from within. Such fragmentation need not be regarded negatively, however, since it necessarily produces both a dialogue across the fragments, as both an increased awareness of differences within 'the movement', and an awareness of the need for self-reflective and critical feminist practice, becomes prevalent. Engaging critically with 'feminism' as a discourse which has the power to both potentially liberate and oppress prompts dialogue around the term 'woman' - who is 'she', where is 'she', where does 'she' come from? - and the assumed, given 'subject' of feminism.

In my introduction I stated that it had become evident, after watching performance art by women, that 'feminism' within women's performance art had not

disappeared but had shifted. In marking those shifts, it would perhaps be more accurate now to suggest that it is not simply 'feminism' that has shifted but the signifier 'woman' (the two shifts obviously interrelated). In my quest to find the feminist subject - 'woman' - in performance, I am confronted with a dissolving nomination. What has become apparent, however, is not that 'woman' has disappeared, but that it is impossible to locate and fix her in one place since she has herself become problematised.

Surely though, as feminists, it is not that we wish to totally eradicate the signifier 'woman' but that we want to challenge and change its potential, future *significations*? This change is not based on a reversal of meanings, turning the negative into the positive, as such a strategy, by necessity, assumes it already knows what 'woman' is and wants, and continues to work within and maintain the gender system. As the history of feminism has shown, while it was an important first step to identify 'woman' as oppressed, and challenge that oppression, such oppressions are differential and multivalent. Focusing singularly on the issue of (unified) gender risks the suppression of internal and external differences and/or the oppression of those located in different places. Neither does 'change' simply imply reinventing 'woman' since 'woman' is a sign produced *in* discourse, and such 'reinventions' will be determined by, and read within or from, already existing discourses. One cannot simply erase the various marks that women are made to bear. The feminist aim then, *on the way to change*, is to challenge the various discourses that produce 'woman' to mean certain things. Importantly, this desire for change implies that something needs to change, positing this something as located in the here and now, which in turn implies that it can and *will be* changed.

In my tracing of the shift from a politics of identity to a politics of subjectivity within women's performance art, I am aware that the identities of feminist politics seem to have disappeared. While the feminist subject may have become destabilised, feminist

politics are not without identities as they necessarily remain grounded in a political will for (and belief in) change - even if the terms and aims of such change continue to be sites for negotiation, with no already decided or guaranteed end in sight.

Moreover, while 'woman' is a sign produced in discourse, 'she' is also more than this since women are material bodies living in the social world. Women *are* matter. And for a feminist, they *do* matter, and must continue to matter. While we may not want to fix what 'woman' means, we cannot lose sight of the fact that she *already* means, variously, and that any feminist political action therefore acknowledges this multiple *already*. While the 'sign' can be destabilised it cannot be totally dematerialised. 'Reality' may be only a discursive construct, but that does not stop it from really impacting bodies.

Contemporary performances perform both the constructed status and shifting possibility of the sign 'woman' through revealing both the discursive operations and productive powers which make woman 'mean', as well as determining the limits of such discourses. These performances undoubtedly serve to shake 'woman' from essentialised and immutable notions of the 'natural', and are therefore implicitly political, even if they resist replacing one 'woman' with another (presumed to be better). In this sense, such performances put into practice Diane Elam's call for a politics of undecidability.

While acknowledging the difference between this strategy and that of earlier women's performance art which took 'woman' as an unproblematised ground for representation, I would like, here, to close the gap between 'earlier' and 'contemporary'. The bridge across this difference is produced through identifying a shared 'ground' - that of challenging the already given. The performances cited in the second section of this thesis, like those in the first, are framed by a struggle *against* something and *towards* change. In contemporary performance, however, the space of 'towards' is refigured as

an 'unknown'. Such performances work against the way woman is already constructed to be read and towards the possibility of different (undecided) future constructions and readings. While 'woman' can no longer be said to 'be', then, that which she variously 'is', here and now, continues to provide the grounds for various political feminist actions. Importantly, while a feminist politics may be undecided in terms of having no pre-defined 'end', such actions in the moment of being *performed* are far from aimless. This is not to deny that the grounds from which such actions are taken are contingent, or that they will change as the discourses which produce them change, partially in response to feminist discourses. What it does imply, however, is that to make a stance - any stance - you need to have somewhere to stand. The difficulty, though, and one addressed throughout this thesis, is how one can stand without becoming rooted to the same spot.

It is apparent that those performances which attempt to negotiate this difficulty utilise a double strategy by *combining* deconstruction and feminism *with* an explicit feminist resistance, thereby reinserting the possibility of political agency for the (decentered) performing subject. Every destabilisation is enacted with a contestation. Bobby Baker destabilises the autobiographical subject while contesting the discursively produced position of 'mother' through exceeding it; Sprinkle destabilises good/bad binaries while contesting the negative sign 'whore' through performing 'whore' differently; Finley destabilises psychoanalytical discourse while contesting the passive position of woman in such discourses through enacting an active resistance; Lee destabilises subject/object positions while contesting the system that would make woman invisible through rendering 'herself' 'unreadable' and literally unpicking the metaphor of such a system; Victoria Baker destabilises sexual identity categories while contesting significatory parameters through seepage; Loomis destabilises heterosexual discourse

while contesting its prescriptive limits through performing lesbian desire in the margins of its structure; Piper destabilises dominant racial discourse while contesting racist assumptions through remarking herself (and me) 'black'; Chowdhry and others destabilise unified identities while contesting organisational categories through showing the difference within; Bustamante destabilises 'woman' while contesting the 'natural' through mimicking excessive white femininity .

What is notable in all of these performances is that 'while' is interchangeable with 'by' - and this is precisely what is meant by working within discourses. Such 'within' does not negate the possibility of directly political challenges to the hegemony, since in each case, the contestation is addressed to, and operates through an exploration of, what is *already* there. The politics within these performances, then, are not situated in some disconnected deconstructive game but are an informed politics, grounded in and by the (constructed but nonetheless present) *real*.

RED AMBER: INTRUSIONS

March 1997: It does not happen very often but I am compelled to keep looking.

January 1999: It does not happen often enough.
But when it does happen it is enough to compel me to keep looking.

The space between 'does not happen' and 'does happen' is a space that increasingly intrudes upon my thought. *What* happens in those performances which ensures my return, but which fails to appear in the others (the majority?)? I suspect that as I struggle to answer this, I will have to go back and negotiate with a former self. One tentative suggestion is that there *is* something about the live, present body that raises the possibility of *presence*, not just in the literal sense, but also connoting a presence of commitment (to feminist politics, to performance), of conviction (a belief in what they

are doing and saying), and resolve (that they have to do this because it needs to be done) which in turn affects the spectating experience. I realise that I am in danger of reinserting the 'aura' (and intention) of the performer here, but there are so many performances which have left me feeling distanced, unconcerned, unmoved, and unbothered. The question ricocheting around my mind at such moments is 'why (did she/I) bother?' And yet, on rare occasions, I feel as if I have (been) moved.

Although I have attempted to blur questions of 'truth' and 'fiction' in this thesis, these terms and their relationships need to be explored further. The performances in which I have been moved from myself are those that hit a 'truth', that have disturbed me out of complacency by showing me something from a new place, opening up another space, provoking questions, debate, daring to go further. In Lisa Wesley's *Mabblethorpe Donkey* (1996),[3] for example, I experienced absolute abjection and loneliness as I watched the performer cross the floor on her hands and knees, naked except for a pair of shoes on her hands, and a sanitary towel pressed over her mouth. In a moment of stillness she turned around and urinated in front of me. In another example, as the solo spectator of Becky Edmunds' *blue funk* (1998),[4] I felt absolute vulnerability and helplessness after watching the performer enact amnesia all around me and then finally come up to the chair in which I was sitting and place her head in my lap. I have never before experienced the barrier between spectator and performer being simultaneously dissolved *and* foregrounded. In this moment, her isolation became my isolation; in spite of her closeness I was unable to reach across (that gap).

While Wesley's performance could be located as 'feminist', it would be more difficult to position Edmunds' in this way, but what Wesley and Edmunds (and others cited in this thesis) have in common is the performing of a 'character' (a donkey and an amnesiac in these latter examples), while simultaneously 'being themselves' The

presence of this 'self', I would suggest, lends an honesty (or truth) to the performance (and here lies their difference from 'theatre'). Those performances which leave me affected are those which seem to offer up or open up the 'self' of the performer. Am I returning, then, to a conception of 'depth', of dredging up the 'truth' of the 'self'? Yet this 'self' is not the autobiographical self but something else. There is a gap somewhere between 'self' and 'Self', then, and presence and (fixed) Presence, and honesty and Truth. Can one 'be' the self without being the Self, have presence without fixing Presence, perform honestly without promoting a Truth? Having sensed these gaps, I can do nothing more than resolve to enter into them.

GREEN: 2000

And so the next journey begins...

The previous one, marked in the pages of this thesis, is just one amongst many and already its contours are beginning to shift, suggesting a different path across a similar map. Undoubtedly I have a long way to go with no possibility of ever arriving but, reinserting my own experience here, it is in the act of movement that encounters with the unexpected become distinct possibilities.

NOTES

Introduction

[1]. The 'diary entry' for 1989 was actually written in March 1997, which raises the notion of the 'fiction' of autobiography, a point pursued in Chapter 4. My rememberings of this event seem clear to me, but how much is this remembering informed by my future reinterpreting my past?

[2]. See *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America, 1970 - 1980*, ed. by Moira Roth (Los Angeles: Astro Artz, 1983), which documents women's involvement in performance art in the USA.

[3]. See, for example, Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art (from Futurism to the Present)* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988); C. Carr, *On Edge: Performance at the End of the Twentieth Century* (NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993); Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde Since 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Philip Auslander, *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992b).

[4]. See, for example, *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, ed. by Lynda Hart (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989); *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Cultural Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990); *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*, ed. by Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993a); Jill Dolan, *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance: On and Beyond the Stage*, ed. by Carol Martin (London: Routledge, 1996); Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997); Alisa Solomon, *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theater and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1997) plus the journal *Women and Performance*. Amelia Jones' text *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), unfortunately appeared in print after the majority of this thesis was written and time has not permitted me to study it in depth. However, it would appear that Jones raises some of the same issues covered here but does so specifically with the aim of elucidating the extent to which 'body art', and in particular the art of the 'eroticized' female performer, deliberately explodes the myths of disinterested spectatorship and universality in relation to aesthetic evaluation.

[5]. Suzanna Danuta Walters, *Material Girls: Making Sense of Feminist Cultural Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 47.

[6]. I am aware of Philip Auslander's separation of transgression and resistance and while I agree that it is more difficult to transgress anything in this current time I certainly do not think it is impossible. Of course, 'transgression' is presumably subjective - it depends on where one's borders are located as to whether they are ever 'transgressed'. See Auslander (1992b).

[7]. This is particularly true of the performances I have seen by 'emerging' performance artists doing 'platform' performances at the National Review of Live Art. Often the same concerns and the means of expressing those concerns will be similar to forms and content used in the 1970s, particularly in relation to 'images' of women, women's bodies, and 'sexism'. *Budding*, performed by Susan Wase and Rebecca Lane, NRLA, Arches (1996), is a case in point. Two women talk about weight, about trying to diet, and the performance ends with them both eating huge chocolate cakes. The pre-publicity reads: 'Two women awkwardly dressed in ballet leotards physically show the struggle to be thin, hairless and beautiful. A comic performance using elements of theatre, dance and cabaret to explore issues surrounding the female body. The performance proposes and then destroys the idea of the female body

as a garden that needs to be maintained and cultivated.' In this performance, then, the focus, like earlier performances, is placed on body image and the socio-cultural pressures of 'being' a woman.

8. Alisa Solomon (1997), p. 19.

9. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1994). p. 39.

10. *High Performance* 33 (1986).

11. I have been unable to locate the first usage of the term, but Sayre decides upon 1970 as his own starting point, since the term 'performance' was first used then by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro in their feminist performance class. It is likely, however, that performance art has always been uncategorisable. There is no definition that entirely 'captures' or 'defines' what performance art is, and there is still a slippage between 'performance', 'live art' and 'performance art', as I will discuss in Chapter 1.

12. Coco Fusco, 'Performance and the Power of the Popular', in *Let's Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance*, ed. by Catherine Ugwu (Seattle: Bay Press & ICA London, 1995), pp. 158 - 75 (p. 160). See also Guillermo Gómes-Peña, 'A New Artistic Continent', in *Art in the Public Interest*, ed. by Arlene Raven (New York: De Capo Press, 1993), pp. 105 - 17. Goldberg would merit Fusco's criticism in relation to a Westernised genealogy of performance art.

13. bell hooks, 'Performance Practice as a Site of Opposition', in Ugwu ed. (1995), pp. 210 - 211 (p. 211).

14. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 7.

15. Ibid., p. 22.

16. Susan Bordo, *Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 35.

17. The 'real' is marked here to suggest that the term, like 'woman', 'black', 'lesbian', is deliberately problematised. As will become clear throughout this thesis, the 'real' cannot be taken to refer unproblematically to something pure and self-present, since the 'real' is always constructed within discourse and always culturally mediated. To state this, however, is not intended to deny that experiences are not real, or really felt - just that such experiences are themselves historically contingent and marked. In places, then, I *will* use the term real without the marks '', to refer to the actual or the lived, as it is experienced here and now. Of course, the 'actual' and the 'lived' are as contingent as the 'real', but I feel that it is important to resist completely erasing the material relations and their real effects in the social world. Thus, for example, there is a real, actual power imbalance between men and women in society. There are also real cases of racism within the Western world. Women really experience sexism. However, there is not a 'real' woman, nor is there a 'real' black person. The 'real', then, is a contestation of an essential, abiding, unchanging 'Truth', while the real is intended as an acknowledgement of the here and now.

The 'real' should be distinguished from the Lacanian concept of the 'Real', since the 'real' as I use it here is more consistent with Lacan's imaginary order. (See footnote 8, p. 374, for a definition of the Lacanian imaginary, and footnote 9, p. 375 for a definition of the Real.) Each writing of the signifier(s) - real, 'real' and Real - should be read within the context in which it is placed. While this may go against the grain of recent theory by attempting to 'secure' the signifier, without such 'temporary stability' I will be unable to suggest differences between the terms, and such differences *do* remain important.

[18]. Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Desire: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 13.

[19]. Linda Gordon, 'What's New In Women's History', in *Feminist Studies Critical Studies*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 20 - 30 (p. 29). Gordon actually writes 'a critique of male supremacy', but I am more interested in the system which would enable or promote such a supremacy, and the challenges made to this system.

[20]. The other most frequently cited 'form' of feminism - liberal feminism - is notably absent from my examination. This decision is based on my understanding of liberal feminism as a strategy that does not aim to directly refigure society as such, but rather which strives to make the present society more inclusive of women. While greater inclusion of women within the present social structure will undoubtedly change the make-up of that structure, it may not, however, change the workings of the structure itself. The danger implicit to the liberal feminist strategy is that in seeking parity between men and women within the dominant system, women have to be, or are seen to be, the same as men, and the male reference point therefore remains dominant.

[21]. Diane Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en Abyme* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[22]. Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1988), p. 64.

[23]. See Diane Elam.

[24]. Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993a).

[25]. Gerry Harris, 'The I of the Beholder: Annie Sprinkle Revisited', in *Shattered Anatomies: Traces of the Body in Performance* (Arnolfini Live, 1997), [n.p.].

[26]. A word about definitions of terms is required here, since one problem intrinsic to working across various discourses is that often the apparently same signifier carries a different signified, when placed within a different discursive context. Thus, in relation to 'other', which I enclose in quotation marks here only to indicate its difference from the common usage of the word, the term within this context relates to the theory of psychoanalysis. Here, the other is a 'real' individual, upon whom the subject relies for a sense of 'self' as differentiated from another. The other reflects back to the self an image of unity and coherency which the self then takes as its own - which, in fact, produces the self *as* a self. The self, then, is dependent on this other. This other, moreover, needs to be distinguished from 'Other', since within psychoanalysis the 'Other' is not a 'real' individual or person, but the locus of the law, language and the symbolic. Thus, the desire of the subject for the other (in order to be a unified 'self') is actually a desire for access to the Other - to be at the centre of control and to achieve (the impossible) satisfaction of desire, which is presumed to reside in this Other and which one believes one could have if one could only properly situate oneself within this Other.

Complicating matters further, this psychoanalytic Other should be distinguished from the postmodern or postcolonial Other, a term used to refer to persons who are positioned on the margins of dominant discourses, enabling those in the centre to produce and maintain their centrality. When the Other is used in this context, then, it refers, for example, to black people, women, lesbians, gay men - that is, those who are not inscribed with power within the social sphere. However, the Other itself should not be seen to be fixed, as one who is positioned as Other in one context may well be positioned as the One - the central figure - in another. Thus, in the relations between white women and black women, the Other is the black woman, while the One is the white woman.

All of the above should signal the importance of reading terms within the contexts in which they are written. As this thesis will use all of these terms, which will be expanded upon in the main body of the text, their intended meanings can be deduced by the reader from the discourses in which they are located.

[27]. See Peggy Phelan (1993a), p. 10.

[28]. The term 'queer' refers to a critical practice in which the 'object' of study is not 'the homosexual', but sexuality in general. Thus, queer theory focuses as much on normative heterosexuality as it does on homosexuality. Indeed, its aim is to problematise both of these sexual categories, challenging the ways in which they have been produced within discourse, their mutual interdependence and their subsequent separation. Queer practice (which blurs the distinction between theory and practice), as a potential and a limit, will be discussed fully in Chapter 6.

[29]. See, in particular, Peggy Phelan (1993a).

[30]. This term is again enclosed in quotation marks here only to draw attention to its difference from the usual application of the word. The use of this word, however, is not simple. In reading psychoanalytically informed texts, it becomes apparent that there is an inconsistency in the signifier, since sometimes it is written as Symbolic, and other times as symbolic. Attempting to avoid confusion, I have decided to use only the lower case version, since unlike other and Other, there would appear to be no difference in the actual application of the term. Where it is written as Symbolic, it would appear that this is a short-hand form used to denote the symbolic *order*.

Adding to the complications of using this word, as Laplanche and Pontalis note, 'To attempt to contain the meaning of "Symbolic" within strict boundaries - to define it - would amount to a contradiction of Lacan's though, since he refuses to acknowledge that the signifier can be permanently bound to the signified.' (J. Laplanche and J. -B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, London: Karnac Books, 1988, p. 440). Indeed, this could equally be said in relation to most of the terms that Lacan uses. However, admitting this difficulty of tying down the signifier, I would define the symbolic generally as the social and cultural order which precedes every subject and as such is that in which we are produced and positioned *as* subjects. Moreover, this order is structured by language and the laws which language guarantees. The symbolic order is the order of signs, the realm of signification which operates through difference and regulation.

[31]. Biddy Martin, 'Sexualities Without Genders and Other Queer Utopias', *Diacritics*, 24.2 - 3 (1994), 104 - 21; Suzanna Danuta Walters, 'From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace (Or, Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Fag?)', *Signs*, 21.4 (1996), 831 - 66.

[32]. Stuart Hall, 'Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities', in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. by Anthony D. King (London: Macmillan, 1991b), pp. 41 - 68.

[33]. Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, 'Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition', in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 146 - 66.

[34]. Peggy Phelan (1993a), p. 31.

[35]. See Adrian Heathfield, ed., 'Event-Text', in *Shattered Anatomies: Traces of the Body in Performance*, (Arnolfini Live, 1997), [n. p.]. In attempting to reinscribe the performances in a way in which their 'event' form is maintained, this anthology upsets the traditional publishing conventions by extending beyond the frames of the pages. One effect of this technique is that the writing does not so easily become 'reproducible' since it cannot be easily photocopied.

[36]. Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 190.

[37]. It would be more accurate to replace 'anticipate' with 'know', since like most introductions this one comes after the production of the main text, and the conversation with myself is already happening even as I write this. On 'introductions' see Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, rev.

edn. (London: Routledge, 1991), and Julian Wolfreys, *Deconstruction•Derrida* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

[38]. Peggy Phelan, 'Reciting the Citation of Others: or, A Second Introduction', in Lynda Hart and Phelan eds. (1993b), pp. 13 - 31 (p. 23). It strikes me that the only way to erase the power imbalance between my writing and performance art would be to turn my writing itself into an ephemeral act, perhaps by making it auto-destruct or by burning it.

[39]. Of course, there is no strictly originary moment, merely incessant movements. See Roland Barthes: 'The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.' 'The Death of the Author', in *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142 - 48 (p. 146). My analysis of Bobby Baker's performance aims to reveal this 'tissue' of quotations alongside my citation of the piece.

[40]. Barthes, p. 147.

[41]. Simon Herbert, 'Bread and Circuses', *Art & Design: Performance Art Into the '90s*, Profile 3 (Academy Group Ltd: 1994), pp. 6 - 35 (p. 29). Herbert is actually recirculating the myth concerning Finley putting yams up her ass. See a response to this myth in *TDR*, 33, 9, by Finley's manager Michael Overn, who writes 'Once and for all: SHE HAS NEVER DONE THIS!!! She smeared tinned (whipped) yams on her buttocks but she never, repeat, never put a yam anywhere. It may seem like a petty mistake but you wouldn't believe the problems this mistake has caused Karen over the years.'

[42]. Nick Kaye, 'British Live Art', in *Art & Design: Performance Art*, Profile 38 (1994b), pp. 87 - 91 (pp. 88 - 89). See also Peter Ansorge, *Disrupting the Spectacle: Five Years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain* (London: Pitman Publishing, 1975); Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain since 1968* (London: Methuen, 1980); Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[43]. Carlson, pp. 100- 120.

[44]. Günter Berghaus, 'Happenings in Europe: Trends, Events, and Leading Figures', in *Happenings and Other Acts*, ed. by Mariellen R Sandford (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 310 - 88 (p. 370).

[45]. Robert Hewison, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960 - 75* (London: Methuen, 1986).

[46]. Kaye, op. cit., p. 88.

[47]. Berghaus, p. 369.

[48]. In the past nine years I have watched many performances that did not achieve this. I decided at the outset of my research that if I were to devote three years of my life (at that point I did not imagine it would be nearer five) to something, then it had to be something I enjoyed - which does not mean that I necessarily 'liked' all of them, for I believe one can enjoy disliking something.

[49]. While this could be seen as being overly subjective, I actively want to avoid talking about some generalised spectator. I hope, then, that my spectatorship will be read as being that of a 'white, educated, lesbian' which will produce links to other spectators - to those both positioned in a similar place and those positioned in very different places. Thus, my writing should produce ramifications for others than myself. However, it will also contain elements that are specific to me, since while I may be white, female, educated, and a lesbian, my embodiment of these categories is both general and particular. In those instances of specificity I hope our differences will surface, as such differences provide other grounds for mutual engagement and negotiation. Additionally, each of these categories through which I name and locate myself are themselves problematic, since I am also variously, and much more than these (issues which I will return to throughout this thesis).

[50]. Of course, this begs the question of why I did not choose to write about the performance I actually witnessed - *A Certain Level of Denial* (ICA, 1995). As a text, *The Constant State of Desire* engages with more of the issues covered throughout this thesis and personally interests me to a greater extent.

[51]. Heathfield [n.p].

[52]. See for example Jill Dolan's article 'In Defense of the Discourse: Materialist Feminism, Potsmodernism, Poststructuralism ... and Theory', *TDR* 33.3 (1989), 58 - 71. See also Barbara Christian, 'The Race for Theory', *Feminist Studies* 14.1 (1988), 67 - 80.

[53]. The Southbank show, *Body Art* (1998), which featured Orlan, Athey and Fakir Musafar was initially placed on 'indefinite hold' by LWT. See Claire Armistead's column 'Provocations' in *The Guardian*, 25 October 1997, for the process that led to this 'hold'. Interestingly, in relation to body art, Armistead writes that 'far from being the preserve of a tiny minority, if you look around you'll find a whole festival of the stuff in Cardiff, while Scotland's biennial Fotofeis is full of photographic fetishism'. The show, prior to being put on hold was first broadcast to the 'compliance officer', who 'couldn't find anything legally actionable in the programme', and then sent it out to a 'consultant' who was briefed to judge its 'intellectual credibility'. This consultant came to the conclusion that Fakir Musafar 'said nothing in his interview which led me to believe his work was part of an art practice. Rather it seemed a personal lifestyle choice'. The 'indefinite hold', however, was reversed, as the programme was broadcast in Spring 1998.

[54]. Following the 'NEA four' spectacle in the USA, exactly such questions were raised. The 'NEA four' - Holly Hughes, Karen Finley, Tim Miller and John Fleck - all had a recommendation for funding by the NEA's panel overturned, following Helms' 'outrage' that public money was being used to support such work. Legislation was subsequently passed which placed restrictive language in NEA grant applications, prohibiting the use of money for works that, in the endowment's judgement, 'may be considered obscene'. Finley took the NEA to court resulting in the federal court ruling that the clause in the NEA legislation was 'unconstitutional'. For examples of the dialogue that resulted around this event, see Richard Bernstein, 'Subsidies for Artists: Is Denying a Grant Really Censorship?', *New York Times*, 18 July 1990; C. Carr, 'War on Art' and 'The New Outlaw Art', *Village Voice*, 5 June and 17 July 1990; Joan Shepard, *Manhattan Daily News*, 2 August, 1989; Gene Seymour, 'Support for Artists', *Newsday*, 12 July 1990. Events were also staged by artists as a response to denied NEA grants, including a press conference and a funeral for freedom of speech.

[55]. During Ron Athey's live performance *4 Scenes in a Harsh Life*, CCA (1994), the venue manager was legally obliged to 'warn' the audience that Athey's blood would be 'present' in the performance space. Athey has HIV positive status.

[56]. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 20 - 21.

[57]. Ibid.

[58]. Judith Butler, 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism"', in Butler & Scott (1992), pp. 3 - 21 (p. 14).

[59]. Bhabha, p. 30.

[60]. Diane Elam, p. 26.

Chapter 1

[1]. *Spy*, June 1991, p 20.

[2]. *Sphinxes Without Secrets (Women Performance Artists Speak Out)*. dir. by Maria Beatty (1990).

[3]. Ibid.

[4]. *Performance: The Living Art*. dir. by R. Vittucio and R. Dwyer (1989).

[5]. Interviewed at ICA, September 1995.

[6]. *Newsday*, February 9, 1990; NY Weekend.

[7]. Ibid.

[8]. Ibid.

[9]. *Village Voice*, 17 July 1990.

[10]. *High Performance*, 19, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1982.

[11]. *Spy*, June 1991, p. 29.

[12]. *Heresies 17*, p. 22.

[13]. Ibid.

[14]. Hélène Cixous, 'Coming to Writing', in *"Coming to Writing" and Other Essays*, ed. by Deborah Jenson (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press Cambridge, 1991), pp. 1 - 58 (p. 49).

[15]. I am aware that 'community' is a contested concept and will discuss the issues involved at another point.

[16]. See my article, 'What's in a Name?', in *Studies in Theatre Production*, 18 (1998), 49 - 75.

[17]. Baz Kershaw does much the same when describing the audience(s) at Glasgow's Tramway, during the Wooster Group's performance *L.S.D (... Just the High Points...)*: 'avant-garde trendies in expensively tailored leather jackets rubbing shoulders with gangs of thin-frocked, streetwise teenage women, no doubt drawn by the filmic presence of Willem Defoe [....]' 'The Politics of Performance in a Postmodern Age', in *Analyzing Performance: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Patrick Campbell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 133 - 51 (p. 140).

[18]. In some instances, 'club' and 'performance venue' themselves become merged, as the event is produced deliberately to be a performance club spectacle. See for example NVA's production of *Virtual World Orchestra*, Fruitmarket (1997), in which contemporary dance music surrounded technological and interactive events and performances by artists such as Stelarc. This was not a 'club' with performances thrown in for entertainment, but was an attempt to mix the two evenly, with neither strand having prominence.

[19]. Herbert (p. 11).

[20]. See for example, Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959); Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40.4 (1988), 519 - 31; Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Performance Art and Ritual: Bodies in Performance', *Theatre Research International*, 22.1 (1997), 22 - 37. For an overview of some of these different frames of reference regarding 'performance' see Carlson (1996). For an analysis of the productive difference between 'performance' in theatre, and 'performativity', see Jill Dolan, 'Geographies of Learning: Theatre Studies, Performance, and the "Performative"', *Theatre Journal*, 45.4 (1993), 417 - 42.

[21]. Stelarc is one practitioner who comes to mind, in his belief in the soon-to-be (already there?) obsolete body. Using mechanical prosthetic devices, technology becomes, in Stelarc's performances, a parasite on the body. The body, while acting as a necessary host for the technology, begins to disappear as the technology and its capabilities become foregrounded. This interpretation is taken from Stelarc's performance *Host* (Arches, Glasgow 1998). See Philip Auslander, 'Liveness: Performance and the anxiety of simulation', in *Performance and Cultural Politics*, ed. by Elin Diamond (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 198 - 213; Gerhard Johann Lischka, 'Performance Art/Life Art/ Mediafication', *Discourse* 14.2 (1992), 124 - 41; Critical Art Ensemble, 'Electronic Disturbances, Telecritical Performance', in *The Last Sex*, ed. by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 208 - 19.

[22]. See Nick Kaye (1994a), pp. 87 - 88.

[23]. See, for example, Goldberg.

[24]. See Carlson, pp. 80 - 86.

[25]. Anaïs Nin, *The Journals of Anaïs Nin 1947 - 1955*, ed. by Gunther Stuhlmann (London: Peter Owen, 1974), p.133.

[26]. I use the term 'histomythography' to indicate a certain mythical history deposited as a result of the continual citation of these movements, performances and performers which in turn serves to posit a teleological 'story' of performance art (and its interrelations with other movements).

[27]. In 1911, for example, Futurist painter Soffici declared that 'the spectator [must] live at the centre of the painted action', while Marinetti, in an all-embracing gesture, declared that 'Thanks to us, the time will come when life will no longer be a simple matter of bread and labour, nor a life of idleness either, but a work of art.' The 'found environment' - an environment located in 'life' - was used frequently by Dadaists in the 1920s, as evidenced by an exhibition held in a courtyard behind a café in Cologne, which could only be reached through a public urinal. Similarly, challenging the separation between artist and spectator (and by extension art and life), Bauhaus artist Moholy-Nagy announced in 1924 that 'It is time to produce a kind of stage activity which will no longer permit the masses to be silent spectators which will [...] allow them to fuse with the action on the stage.' Goldberg (1988), p. 117. See also Mariellen R Sandford, ed., *Happenings and Other Acts* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[28]. Jackson Pollock. Written remarks published in Francis Valentine O'Connor and Eugene Victor, *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonne of Painting, Drawings and Other Works*, Vol. 4. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). Quoted in Valie Export, 'Persona, Proto-Performance, Politics: A Preface', *Discourse*, 14.2 (1992), 26 - 35 (p. 26).

[29]. Sayre, p. 4.

[30]. Golderg, p. 126.

[31]. Allan Kaprow, *Assemblages, Environments & Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966). See also Adrian Henri, *Environments and Happenings* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974); Udo Kultermann, *Art-Events and Happenings*, trans. by John William Gabriel (London: Mathews Miller Dunbar, 1971).

[32]. Michael Kirby, 'An Introduction', in Sandford, ed., pp. 1 - 20 (p. 10).

[33]. Jon Erickson, 'The Spectacle of the Anti-Spectacle: Happenings and the Situationist International', *Discourse*, 14.2 (1992), 36 - 58 (p. 40). Of course, from a present-day perspective this strategy of resisting the commodification of 'art' by denying it an object status has been undermined by the fact that it is no longer only 'objects' that are incorporated into the market, but also ideas and concepts.

[34]. Flynt, quoted in Export, p. 31. Originally from Henry Flynt, *Blueprint for a Higher Civilization*, ed. by Germano Celant (Milan: Multhipla, 1975).

[35]. Export, p. 32.

[36]. I will address this later.

[37]. I do not mean to suggest that there are no performance events outwith these institutions, as this is obviously not the case. American performance artist Julie Laffin, for example, consistently performs in public spaces, typically using the 'sidewalk' within her work. In *Various States of D(u)ress* (1994), Laffin's performance involved her crawling along the pavements of New York. However, such work frequently remains tied to galleries in that the work is produced or programmed and marketed by the galleries, even though it may be 'staged' outwith them. Another of Laffin's performances, *Red Gown* (1996), an 'opening event' for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, took place on the steps of the Gallery.

[38]. It is important, however, to resist reinstating the original/copy and live/recorded binaries here. These other merchandising materials might be 'originals' in their own right - that is, not recordings of the event, but different events. However, complicating this, Auslander has stated that 'the breakdown of the distinction between live and mediated performance, [is] perhaps the final frontier of 'authenticity' in performance [....]' He continues: 'The live performances [...] exist side by side with the films, videotapes, records, and books [...]; each object takes its place in an overall cultural flow that defines each by its relation to the others rather than intrinsically. When the same object is available in several mediated forms, the meaning of each one as an experience is likely to derive from its relation to another.' (1992b), pp. 65 - 68.

[39]. Janine Antoni, *Slumber*, Anthony d'Offay Gallery (1994).

[40]. Josette Féral, 'What is Left of Performance Art? Autopsy of a Function, Birth of a Genre', *Discourse*, 14.2 (1992), 142 - 61.

[41]. Féral, pp. 148 - 49.

[42]. Ibid., p. 148.

[43]. Ibid., p. 145.

[44]. Ibid., p. 149.

[45]. Ibid., pp. 143 - 44.

[46]. Ibid., p. 157.

[47]. Quoted in Kaye (1994a), p. 28. Fried's article, 'Art and Objecthood', appeared in *Artforum* 10 (Summer 1967), 12 - 23.

[48]. Ibid., p. 2.

[49]. Ibid., p. 26.

[50]. See Philip Auslander, 'Orlan's Theatre of Operations', *Theatre Forum*, 6 (1995), 25 - 31; Carey Lovelace, 'Orlan: Offensive Acts', *PAJ*, 49 (1995), 13 - 25; Kathryn Pauly Morgan, 'Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women's Bodies', *Hypatia*, 6.3 (1991), 25 - 53

[51]. There is a danger within my writing that I am serving to reinstate the commercial/non-commercial binary, which has itself become dislodged. As Auslander (1992b) states, 'A fundamental aspect of postmodern culture may be described as a collapse of the distinction between the economic and the cultural realms within capitalism [...] It is not that the cultural has deteriorated but [...] that the social and economic have become cultural [...] the cultural can no longer presume to stand back from the economic/political and comment on it from without.' (p. 10.) However, to contest Féral's article, I am suggesting that contemporary performance still has the capacity to challenge commodification, even if that challenge is more indirect.

[52]. See, for example, Linda Nicholson, ed., *Feminism Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1990); Tania Modleski, *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age* (London: Routledge, 1991); Butler and Scott eds. (1992).

[53]. Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 14.

[54]. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. xxii. Moreover, it is apparent that there is a great deal of slippage between terms/practices used as examples of the 'postmodern'. A glance at the *Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*, ed. by Stuart Sim (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1998), positions deconstruction, poststructuralism, post-Marxism *as* postmodern and yet there are huge differences between (and within) all of these terms.

[55]. Felski, p. 15.

[56]. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. vii.

[57]. Huyssen, p. 53.

[58]. Roy Boyne & Ali Rattansi, *Postmodernism and Society* (London: Macmillan Press, 1990), p.6.

[59]. Kaye (1994a), p. 3. This (non)description bears an uncanny similarity to the (non)descriptions of performance art. It is perhaps for this reason that many critics turn to it as an exemplar of postmodern practice.

[60]. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. xxiii.

Chapter 2

[1]. Stuart Hall, 'The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity', in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. by Anthony D. King (London: Macmillan, 1991a), pp. 19 - 39 (p. 34).

[2]. Existing alongside - or underneath - these movements, in both Britain and the USA, was the 'underground' and the 'counter culture', both initially cultural movements arising in opposition to the hegemonic culture of the 1960s. For more on this see Hewison.

[3]. Lynne Segal, 'A Local Experience', in *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism*, ed. by Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright (London: Merlin Press, 1979), pp. 157 - 209 (p. 164). See also *Once a Feminist - Stories of a Generation*, ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Virago Press, 1990), and Michelene Wandor, *The Body Politic* (London: stage 1, 1972). For an exposition and critique of socialist feminism, see Michèle Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* (London: Verso, 1980). For an account of contemporary British feminism see Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics: Women and Power in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[4]. See Maren Lockwood Carden, *The New Feminist Movement* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1974), and Sheila Rowbotham, *The Past Is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s* (London: Pandora Press, 1989).

[5]. See Wandor (1990), pp. 103 - 04.

[6]. See Wainwright, 'Introduction', in Rowbotham (1979), pp. 1 - 20 (p. 13): 'The causes of [...] oppression are social and economic, but these causes could only be revealed and confronted when women challenged the assumptions of their personal life, of who does the housework, of the way the children are brought up, the quality of our friendships, even the way we make love and with whom. These were not normally the subject of politics. Yet these are the problems of everyday life, the problems about which women talk most to other women... When the women's movement made these issues part of socialist politics, it began to break down the barriers which have kept so many people, especially women, out of politics. Before the women's movement, socialist politics like all other sorts of politics seemed something separate from everyday life.'

[7]. Loren Kruger, 'The Dis-Play's the Thing: Gender and Public Sphere in Contemporary British Theater', *Theatre Journal*, 42.1 (1990), 27 - 47 (p. 27).

[8]. See Wandor (1972), p. 249. Unfortunately, however, the participants in this action severely underestimated the power of the media to distort and manipulate the event. The focus was placed on presenter Bob Hope's hysterical reaction to the agitation, with his description of the feminists as 'bomb-throwing drug addicts' rather than on the aims of the disruption.

[9]. Carden, p. 63.

[10]. This is not to suggest that there were *no* performance artists working in Britain at this time, since, for example, Rose English was already well known. However, performance art as a (non)specific form was not yet widely recognised.

[11]. Of course, as indicated earlier, there were other alternative forms in circulation alongside political theatre, as exemplified by Welfare State and The People Show. More 'art-based' forms of feminist performance will be discussed later in this section.

[12]. In fact, C.A.S.T., AgitProp and Red Ladder are all linked, since AgitProp arose out of C.A.S.T. and Red Ladder developed from AgitProp.

[13]. See *Strike While the Iron Is Hot: Three Plays on Sexual Politics*, ed. by Michelene Wandor (London: Journeyman Press, 1980).

[14]. For comprehensive information regarding feminist theatre companies see Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatre*; Helen Keyssar, *Feminist Theatres* (London: Macmillan, 1984); Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1988); Gayle Austin, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*; Gillian Hanna, *Monstrous Regiment: A Collective Celebration* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1991); Elaine Aston, *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1995); Sandra Freeman, *Putting Your Daughters on the Stage: Lesbian Theatre from the 1970s to the 1990s* (London: Cassell, 1997). See also Itzin (1980); Kershaw (1992).

[15]. For details of Tattycoram, see Goodman, pp. 184 - 88.

[16]. Stella Hall, 'Profile: Bloodgroup', in *Performance*, 22, 8 - 11 (p.10).

[17]. 'National Performance Listings', *Performance*, 20/21, p. 54.

[18]. Hall, p. 10..

[19]. Ibid., p. 11.

[20]. Ibid.

[21]. 'National Performance Listings', *Performance*, 23, 17 - 19.

[22]. See 'National Performance Listings', *Performance*, 14. [n. p]. More recently, both the CCA and the ICA held all-women performance art 'Seasons', entitled *Bad Girls* (1994) and *Jezebels* (1995). It is notable that both seasons position the performers as inappropriate women through their titles, even if the performances enact an appropriation, contestation or investigation of such terms.

[23]. The boundaries blur here between performance art, activist art, interventionist performance/art/theatre, guerrilla art/performance, radical street theatre. Such 'events' are becoming increasingly documented. See, for two recent examples, *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology*, ed. by Jan Cohen-Cruz (London: Routledge, 1998) and *But is it Art?: The Spirit of Art as Activism*, ed. by Nina Felshin (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

[24]. See *Performance*, 22, 36 - 37.

[25]. See Sarah Schulman, *My American History - Lesbian and Gay Life During the Reagan/Bush Years* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 281. Other actions include the response to the Cedar Park Baptist Church's sign in Texas, 'Don't be deceived: homosexuals commit the most heinous crimes in America.' The local Chapter of Avengers dumped a 3-foot pile of horse manure into the church parking lot before the Sunday services, and posted various flyers that said 'Homophobia Stinks' and 'You eat shit, we eat clit'. Another feminist group to stage successful performance spectacles are the Guerrilla Girls. See *Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls*, by the Guerrilla Girls (whoever they really are) (London: Pandora, 1995); Elizabeth Hess, 'Guerrilla Girl Power: Why the Art World Needs a Conscience', in Felshin ed., pp. 309 - 32.

[26]. At *Bad Girls* CCA (1994), there was Sprinkle, Pamela Sneed, Penny Arcade, and Leslie Hill. At *Jezebels*, ICA (1995), there was Nao Bustamante, Karen Finley, Leslie Hill, Marissa Carr, Helen Paris, Rona Lee, Elie Arce, La Ribot.

[27]. This may be one paradox evident within 'performance art' practice. Although performance art as a form may have wished to challenge the status of the 'artistic genius', it largely, through its prevalence of solo performances, reinscribed the figure of the 'artist' as creative individual. Some of these artists may, of course, have collaborated with other artists on certain performances. In *Handcuff* (1973), Linda Montano and Tom Manioni were handcuffed to each other for three days and Montano and Tehching Hsieh were tied together with rope for a year in *One Year Performance* (1983 - 84). However, such collaborations were sporadic rather than continuous.

[28]. Thanks to Greg Giesekam for bringing this to my attention.

[29]. Such disparity between the documentation of the history of women' s performance art in the USA and Britain indicates a gap in research which I hope to be able to address in future comparative work. While *Performance* lists many female performance artists, there seems to be little information about the work that was produced during the 1970s.

[30]. Judy Chicago, quoted in Lucy Lippard, *From the Centre: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976), p. 215.

[31]. Judy Chicago, quoted in Catherine Elwes, 'Floating Femininity: A Look at Performance Art by Women', in *Women's Images of Men*, ed. by Kent And Morreau (London: Writers and Readers Publishing, 1985), pp. 164 - 93 (p. 177).

[32]. Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (London: The Women's Press, 1982), p.114.

[33]. Chicago in Sayre, p. 95.

[34]. Moira Roth, 'Autobiography, Theatre, Mysticism and Politics: Women's Performance Art in South California', in *Performance Anthology: Source Book of California Performance Art*, ed. by Carl E Loeffler (San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1980), pp. 463 - 89 (p. 463).

[35]. Ibid, p. 464.

[36]. Chris Straayer, 'I Say I Am: Feminist Performance Video in the '70s', *Afterimage* [n.v.] (1985), 8 - 12 (p. 8).

[37]. Although I would maintain that it is often difficult to draw a distinct separation between 'art' and 'political spectacle' since the latter often deliberately utilises artistic forms to make the spectacle.

[38]. However, Kaprow also presented work which included gender-specific activities. In the happening *Eat* , for example, it is the women performers who cook all the food.

[39]. Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 95

[40]. Of course, the creator of the piece, using particular performance strategies, can assert a certain amount of control over what is shown, in what way, and when, but the final production of the piece will rest with the observer. Many performers actively represent this relationship between spectator and performer, foregrounding the power dynamics that exist in the space in-between. For instance, Fiona Wright, in her performance *Bride Kicks* (NRLA, Third Eye Centre 1990), enters the performance space and immediately begins to circle around it, constantly maintaining eye contact with the spectators, challenging their spectatorship by returning their look.

[41]. Quoted in Roth (1980a), p. 466. I will be contesting the concept of the 'authentic' in Chapter 4, but draw attention to the fact that here Chicago is specifically referencing authentic *feelings*.

[42]. Elwes, pp. 172 - 73.

[43]. Description and quote from *High Performance*, 45 (1989), 34 - 37. The theory running beneath this performance relates to the theory of film spectatorship. An enduringly illuminating article is Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen*, 16 (1975), 6- 18. I have chosen not to focus on Mulvey's notions of the 'male gaze', voyeurism and scopophilia here because they are well documented in many texts - see, for instance, Dolan (1988). Furthermore, Mulvey's theories were produced specifically in relation to the medium of film, and I think it is misguided to conflate film and performance since they are very different representational forms. The presence of the live performer, the temporal nature of the event, the proximity (or dissolving) of performance space and spectator space, and the absence of a framing screen all pose difficulties for the suspension of disbelief that would propel the viewer into a loss of ego while watching a film.

[44]. *High Performance*, 45 (1989), 34 - 37

[45]. Yoko Ono's performance, *Cut Piece* (1964 - 65), is similar in form to Export's. Wearing a flimsy dress, Ono invited spectators in the Indica Gallery to cut it away with scissors. In spite of cat-calls, no-one approached the audience until finally a student and the gallery porter snipped off tiny fragments from the hem of her dress. For a description of this see Regina Cornwell, 'Interactive Art: Touching the "Body in the Mind"', *Discourse*, 14.2 (1992), 203 - 21 (p. 206) and Chrissie Iles, 'Yoko Ono', in the exhibition catalogue *Yoko One: Have You Seen the Horizon Lately* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art [n.d]), pp. 6 - 136. I am tempted to say that they did not cut Ono's dress because they do not want to reveal their desire in public, to a live woman. However, as my supervisor Greg Giesekam has indicated, it is too simple, perhaps, to suggest that the one who *does* 'cut' is the one displaying his desire since performances of this nature *demand* the participation of the audience to proceed. The one who 'cuts', then, may be viewed as the one who enables the performance to happen. I am reminded here of a recent performance, Elia Arce's *Stretching My Skin Until It Rips Whole* (ICA 1995), in which Arce randomly selected two female spectators to enter the performance space and cut her dress off. Witnessing them undertake this task I felt that, rather than being a violation, this was a moment of gentleness, as if they were carefully cutting away the constricting - albeit nourishing - skin of maternal heritage in which Arce was confined.

[46]. I will question this assertion of subjectivity at a later point.

[47]. By 'radical feminism' I am implying here a British form of feminism based on separatism. Jill Dolan actually calls this strand of feminism 'cultural feminism', while stating that 'radical feminism was based on a theoretical struggle to abolish gender as a defining category between men and women.' The British 'radical feminism' is synonymous with Dolan's 'cultural feminism' and not American 'radical feminism'. I have decided to use the term 'radical' since I believe that it avoids the potential confusion circulating around the word 'cultural' - particularly in relation to the cultural construction of femininity.

[48]. Dolan (1988), p. 10.

[49]. Rosemary Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. xi.

[50]. This 'shift' will be marked throughout this thesis.

[51]. See Mia Campioni and Elizabeth Grosz, 'Love's Labours Lost: Marxism and Feminism', in *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge*, ed. Sneja Gunew (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 366 - 397.

[52]. Hennessy, p. xii.

[53]. Dolan, op. cit.

[54]. Ibid., p. 11.

[55]. Hennessy, p. xii.

[56]. Dolan (1988), p. 10.

[57]. Ibid., p. 7.

[58]. For example, *Ablutions*, (1972), *In Mourning and in Rage*, (1977), *Freeze Frame: Room for Living Room* (1982), *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind* (1984).

[59]. Initially Lacy approached two large shopping complexes to try and secure a place for the maps but both refused her request, one on the grounds that it was `controversial subject matter`. Finally, a supportive City Commissioner offered Lacy the City Mall Shopping Center, which was beside the City Hall. While not her first choice, this position proved to be beneficial, as the city government became supportive of the entire project, and involved with the issues and aims of the piece, including attendance at press conferences and events.

[60]. Loeffler, p. 315.

[61]. Suzanne Lacy, `Evolution of a Feminist Art`, *Heresies*, 2.2 (1978), 78 - 83 (p. 83).

[62]. Dolan (1988), p. 7.

[63]. *High Performance*, 1 (1978), p. 39.

[64]. Moira Roth, however, suggests that implicit to much of Lacy`s work is a revalorisation of the `witch`, which again signals the danger of neatly separating the `materialist` from the `radical`. See Moira Roth, `Suzanne Lacy: Social Reformer and Witch` in *TDR*, 32.1 (1988), 42 - 60.

[65]. Description taken from Roth (1983), pp. 33 - 34.

[66]. Ibid., p. 34.

[67]. Ibid., p. 38.

[68]. Suzanne Lacy, quoted in Roth.

[69]. Faith Wilding quoted in Lippard (1976), p. 73.

Chapter 3

[1]. Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy* (New York: New Paltz, Documentext, 1979), p. 194.

[2]. Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman, quoted in Judith Barry, `Women, Representation, and Performance Art: Northern California`, in Loeffler, pp. 439 - 62 (p. 452).

[3]. Schneemann (1979), pp. 238 - 39. This 'text' had previously appeared in Schneemann's film *Kitch's Last Meal*.

[4]. Carolee Schneemann quoted in Kossia Orloff, 'Women and Performance Art: The Alternative Persona', *Heresies*, 17 [n.d.], 36 - 40 (p. 37).

[5]. Carolee Schneemann, 'Ages of the Avant-Garde', *Performance Art Journal*, 16.1 (1994), 18 - 22 (p. 19).

[6]. Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), pp. 245 - 64 (p. 245). Originally from *Signs*, Summer 1976.

[7]. I find myself in an uneasy relation to Lacanian discourse. Does this discourse merely describe and attempt to explain existing social relations, or does it reinforce them within its theory? My unease will be visibly performed throughout this thesis, as I both borrow from and resist Lacanian psychoanalysis. While I am attracted to the Lacanian concept of subject formation in language I resist the primacy given to the 'phallus' within this conception, and the corresponding explanation of gender positionings as resulting from one's position in relation to the phallus. My necessary distillation of Lacanian psychoanalysis here leaves many gaps, and while I will return to psychoanalytic discourse at various points throughout this thesis, I would refer the reader to Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), which is an invaluable text for accessing Lacanian theory. See also *Feminine Sexuality: Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, ed. by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (London: Macmillan Press, 1982).

[8]. The term 'imaginary' is enclosed in quotation marks here to denote its belonging to a specific discourse, namely psychoanalysis. The imaginary, though not unrelated to the more general understanding of that term, is again, like the symbolic, an order. Also like that term, the imaginary is designated variously within different texts as being capitalised or uncapitalised. In this thesis, for the sake of consistency, I will use the uncapitalised version. The imaginary order, in distinction to the symbolic order, is governed by relations between the self and the other. It is imaginary because the self obtains a sense of itself from an identification with an external other, which then becomes internalised *as* the image of the self. This external image is perceived as unified and coherent, unlike the infant which at that moment of perception experiences itself as disunified. The introjection of this unified other *as* the self is therefore a misrecognition of the self as unified, since this very self, produced as it is through identifying with an external image, is necessarily a split self; this 'split' is then denied through a belief in the self's (and the other's) unity. This unified self, then, is the ideal, imaginary self, establishing the imaginary order in which disunity (or the split between signifier and signified) can be disavowed.

[9]. The 'Real', another order to be distinguished from both the imaginary and the symbolic, within psychoanalysis, is always capitalised to distinguish it from the 'real'. The Real refers to the order preceding both the imaginary and symbolic order, before the child has formed an imaginary ego and has taken up a place as a subject within the symbolic. Since it can only be known through the imaginary and symbolic order, it can never actually be known as it was. Thus, it refers to that which is excluded from the symbolic, that which existed before the imposing of an order. The Real, then, is the place in which it is supposed there was no lack, prior to the subject's becoming a subject - although this assumption is itself an imaginary one, since the actual Real can never be experienced. The Real, then, is not the 'real', but may be the impossible real.

[10]. Hélène Cixous (1981), p. 257.

[11]. There is a danger in collapsing these theorists into this one frame of reference, since their theoretical stances are widely divergent.

[12]. Susan Sellers, *Hélène Cixous - Authorship, Autobiography and Love* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996) p. 3.

[13]. The figure of Derrida is lurking somewhere between these two poles - writing and speaking. Is it possible that Cixous is overturning the privileging of the spoken over the written, and that her concept of 'writing', like Derrida's, extends beyond the marks on a page? As is by well now rehearsed, philosophy has traditionally privileged the spoken word, perceiving it to be closer to the thinking subject, and therefore containing within it the presence of the speaker. It is assumed that there is no gap between speech and thought, unlike in writing, which operates on absences, in that the speaker is necessarily absent having been replaced by the written word. Derrida has questioned the whole notion of the immediacy of spoken language, by referring to the gap between the signifier and the signified, and the ever shifting nature of the signifier based on the concept of *différance*, as well as the existence of both presence and absence within every word. Speech, therefore, is already 'writing'.

I would also like to draw attention here to the fact that Cixous herself has heralded theatre as the vehicle in which the writer can truly inscribe the *other*. She believes that in theatre one can relinquish the language of the self, and allow the language of the other to enter. However, it is the *characters* within the written text that let her speak their language. In performance art there are no 'characters' as such, only 'the self'. I will later explore the notion of internal 'others', contesting the concept of 'the self'.

[14]. Hélène Cixous, 'From the Scene of the Unconscious to the Scene of History', in *The Future of Literary Theory*, ed. by Ralph Cohen (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 24 quoted in Sellers (1996), pp. xiv - xv.

[15]. Hélène Cixous, 'Conversations', in *Writing Differences: Readings from the Seminar of Hélène Cixous*, ed. by Susan Sellers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 141 - 54 (p. 153).

[16]. I am here positing what is often assumed to be a 'feature' of performance art and one that makes it a desirable form of expression for women. This notion of the 'self' and 'depth' will be contested in Chapter 4 onwards.

[17]. Cixous (1988b), pp. 151 - 52.

[18]. Cixous, 'Coming to Writing', in *"Coming to Writing" and Other Essays*, ed. by Deborah Jenson (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 1 - 58 (p. 52). See also Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* trans. by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 118. 'Writing is not there, it does not happen out there, it does not come from outside. On the contrary, it comes from deep inside.[...] It is deep in my body, further down, behind thought.'

[19]. Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pg. 42.

[20]. See Cixous 'The Last Painting or the Portrait of God' in Jenson, ed., pp. 104 - 31 (p. 127). As my thesis supervisor has remarked, however, this scroll has had to be inserted prior to the performance. In reality, then, that which is inside has actually come from the outside. How might we read this? This 'insertion' could actually enact a resistance to locating the performance as being an example of radical feminism, for it implies that what is inside the body is a result of external forces: that is, the impact of social, historical and political forces are inscribed within the body. Schneemann's body then, in this reading, is materially grounded, and the text she removes is a textual affect of that materially lived reality. However, when I was researching this performance, it did not occur to me that the text had necessarily been previously inserted. I was caught up in the moment of externalisation. Speaking with, or mimicking, a radical feminist voice I could say that my supervisor's observation of 'insertion' reveals

something about his own desires and unconscious, while my focus on expulsion, on bringing forth, in turn reveals something about mine.

However, on a more serious note, this bringing out of a text previously inscribed displays a Derridean moment of *différance*. As the text is put into the body, it cannot strictly be said to emanate from it. Both the words, and the body from which they issue forth, are always already written - there are no pure, present words nor is there a purely present body. Thus, while it may be said that Schneemann is writing the body, the body is actually always already written (as I will explore later in this chapter). Her writing is, if anything, a rewriting, but even as a rewriting it necessarily contains the traces of the previous inscriptions. From this viewpoint, Schneemann's insertion of the written text could be read as a literalisation of this 'already written' state of the body.

[21]. See Cixous, 'Extreme Fidelity', for reference to the feminine economy and the willingness to know the inside, in her rereading of the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in, in Sellers ed. (1988), pp. 9 - 36, (p. 16).

[22]. Françoise Defromont, 'Metaphorical Thinking and Poetic Writing in Virginia Woolf and Hélène Cixous', in *The Body and the Text - Hélène Cixous, Reading and Teaching*, ed. by Helen Wilcox, Keith McWatters, Ann Thompson and Linda R Williams (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 114 - 25 (p. 120).

[23]. Cixous (1986), p. 90.

[24]. Cixous (1988b), p. 150.

[25]. Cixous (1986), p. 97.

[26]. Ibid, p. 83.

[27]. Sellers (1996), p. 7.

[28]. Cixous (1988b), pp. 55- 56.

[29]. For example, James Joyce and Jean Genet.

[30]. Cixous (1991a), p. 49. The reader should bear this quote in mind during my analysis of Karen Finley's performance, *The Constant State of Desire*, in Chapter 5.

[31]. Bisexuality should here be read as sexual multiplicity. This is a bisexuality pertaining to Freud's theory of the child as a subject with both masculine and feminine libidinal economies in co-existence. See Cixous (1988a), p. 14. 'In order to try to distinguish vital functions, we distinguish two principal libidinal economies; but they do not distinguish themselves in such a decisive way in reality: in the living there are traits which obliterate themselves, which blend together.' See also Sarah Cornell, 'Hélène Cixous and les Etudes Feminines', in Wilcox ed., pp. 31 - 40 (p. 38). 'In poetic writing, as in music, this originary bisexuality, or this sexual indecisiveness, can express itself freely. There is uncertainty, crossing, blending, interweaving of the two libidinal economies.'

[32]. Cixous (1991a), p. 49. The reference here to 'social constructions' is admittedly problematic, suggesting as it does a pre-constructed body. However, I resist reading 'beyond' as 'return', promoting instead the sense of a not yet known 'future'. While I do not read Annie Sprinkle's performance *Post Post Porn Modernist* through Cixous' theory, this notion of fluidity does relate to what I will suggest in Chapter 5.

[33]. Ibid, p. 51.

[34]. The 'before' in this sentence is again problematic, but I would maintain that it is suggestive of 'beyond' the present, rather than a return to the pre-patriarchal feminine body.

[35]. Dolan (1988), p. 64.

[36]. I do not mean to privilege vision over reading here, merely to suggest that the liveness of the female body in performance art - its presence before us - creates a different impact than the purely imagined body, which is precisely one of the reasons that women chose to use it as a medium of expression.

[37]. Quoted in Schneider, p. 40.

[38]. Schneemann (1977), p. 197. This observation relates directly to the line in Schneemann's extracted text which reads '(I don't take the advice of men who only talk to themselves)'.

[39]. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 121.

[40]. Ibid., p. 97.

[41]. *Fluxus*, Radio 3, 16 March 1997.

[42]. And of course, if she had not been expelled, then the boundaries would have shifted and the shape of Fluxus would necessarily have altered. Where would such a shift have left its founder?

[43]. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, eds, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970 - 85* (London: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 118. I will return to the destabilisation of 'representation as reflection' at the end of this chapter.

[44]. And, as indicated in Chapter 1, the 'frame' stabilises and maintains the 'market in art'.

[45]. What is noticeable is that the boundary works productively in both directions - both remarking the obscene but also enabling those remarked to contest such judgements as evidenced by the political activity of artists following the NEA's reversal of funding decisions.

[46]. The history of the obscene/art binary can be traced back to the increase in communication technologies in the nineteenth century, including printed matter. Reading the binary through a Foucauldian lens, the slash in-between performs as a 'controlling mechanism' by marking (that is 'producing') certain materials as inappropriate. Such separation was enacted by the bourgeoisie in an attempt to stem the rising tide of 'mass' culture. The binary, then, operates as a value judgement, demarcating the 'worthy' from the 'unworthy', the 'prized' from the 'despised'. In contemporary Britain, obscenity is obtusely defined in the 1964 Obscene Publications Act as materials which 'if taken as a whole [...] tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all the relative circumstances, to read, see, or hear the matter contained in it'. In the United States, material is defined as obscene if: '1) the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest; and 2) the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct; and 3) the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.' Quoted in Brian McNair, *Mediated Sex: Pornography and Postmodern Culture* (London: Arnold, 1996), p. 55. The precise definition of 'obscene' becomes no more than a subjective act. Who is the 'average person'? (Could I suggest, here, that 'average' equates with powerful - that is, white, middle-class, heterosexual?) What are contemporary community standards? Which 'community' is being referenced here? What is a prurient interest? Who decides what is 'offensive'? Who decides what the 'value' of the work is? This constitutional definition of 'obscenity' offers a unified subject, undifferentiated by subject positioning, as if such a subject exists, and that the spectators or audience of a piece of work all react to it in exactly the same manner, passing judgement

consensually. It also suggests the unified subject, who holds only one opinion, fixed in time, and whose interpretation or response is unambiguous.

[47]. Douglas, p. 113. [Italics mine.]

[48]. Schneider, pp. 13 - 16; Vivian M. Patraka, 'Binary Terror and Feminist Performance: Reading Both Ways', *Discourse*, 14.2 (1992), 163 - 85.

[49]. Schneider, p. 13.

[50]. Schneemann (1994), p.18. The sentence continues with '*and wonderful.*' Unfortunately she doesn't state who reacted in what way.

[51]. Lippard (1976), p. 125.

[52]. Performance artist Lisa Watts, in *Breadmaking* (NRLA, Third Eye Centre 1990), presented an amusing parody of Yves Klein's work when, after rolling her body around in dough, she threw herself against black strips of paper hanging on the gallery wall, thus leaving a floury trace of her body as the finished 'product'. In this action, the 'domestic' and the 'artistic' were startlingly juxtaposed.

[53]. The brush was actually attached to her underwear.

[54]. Schneider, p. 38.

[55]. Kubota was not actually naked in her performance but the brush extending from her vagina would nevertheless implicitly imply, or suggest, nakedness.

[56]. Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 4.

[57]. Of course, the body is never simply 'matter' - a point I will foreground in a moment.

[58]. Quoted in Schneider, p. 38.

[59]. Nead, p. 22.

[60]. Ibid.

[61]. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, ed. by R.E. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

[62]. Douglas, p. 115 and p. 121.

[63]. See Nead, p. 32.

[64]. Nead, p. 16.

[65]. Dolan (1988), p. 84.

[66]. Dolan actually misnames the piece, confusing it with another of Schneemann's performances, *Up To and Including Her Limits* (1973 - 76).

[67]. Of course, as I have attempted to show, the distinction between one strategy and another is often not easily arrived at. Schneemann's performance could be read as a 'personal performance', drawing only on her own experience of being a marginalised female artist in a male dominated environment.

Alternatively, it could be read as signalling the existence of an alternative, specifically feminine aesthetic. I believe that her performance is an example of the degree of undecidability that exists within most performance art.

[68]. See Jeanie Forte, 'Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism', *Theatre Journal*, 40.2 (1988), 217 - 35.

[69]. Moira Schor, 'From Liberation to Lack', *Heresies*, 24 [n.d.], 15 - 21 (p. 15).

[70]. Suzanna Danuta Walters (1995), pp. 45 - 46. Walters' is actually referencing images of women in media, but her point here remains pertinent to images of women in performance art.

[71]. Kate Davy, 'Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative: Dress Suits to Hire', in *A Source Book of Feminist Theatre and Performance: On and Beyond the Stage*, ed. by Carol Martin (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 136 - 56 (p. 141) (first publ. in *TDR*, 33.1 (1989), 153 - 70).

[72]. I am not suggesting that materialist feminism does not address the constructed nature of 'woman'. I am suggesting, however, that in the 1970s and '80s, the subject of feminism - 'woman' - was somewhat paradoxically presented as already known. Beneath the construction lay a common identity. This could be read, then, as an essentialising moment within materialist feminism. However, neither do I wish to neglect the hugely necessary work done by materialist feminists in this period. I wish to resist locating this practice as 'wrong' since I believe that the initial politicising of women demanded the identification of a common (oppressed) identity. Moreover, I believe that such moments of essentialising continue to be strategically important when attempting to challenge the here and now of specific or localised material conditions. That said, material feminism should not uncritically remain fixed to the ground it initially produced, since it can be usefully supplemented, developed and/or challenged by other theories (and can in turn challenge those), particularly in relation to critiques of 'identity'. This will be explicated further in the next Section.

[73]. Jane Flax, 'The End of Innocence', in Butler and Scott eds. (1992), pp. 445 - 63 (pp. 447 - 48).

[74]. Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 34. Note that Flax refers to the 'real' as the Real. I have elected not to write this supposed truth of reality as the Real to avoid confusion with Lacan's 'Real'. However, the two are not unrelated, since both refer to that which is before signification, and therefore unmediated.

[75]. Of course, not all men - only those men in a position of authority are able to represent the 'real.'

[76]. Jane Flax (1990), p. 230.

[77]. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p.130.

[78]. Joan W. Scott, 'Experience', in Butler and Scott eds. (1992), pp. 22 - 40 (p. 37).

[79]. For a prime example of the mutability of 'meaning', see Thomas Laquer's mapping of the way in which the 'body' has been variously inscribed to mean certain things in *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990). According to Laquer, 'sex as we know it was invented' in the eighteenth century (p. 149), as the 'one sex' model gave way to the 'two sex' model, a 'development' linked closely to Western industrialisation, and the waning of Biblical 'truth'. Science and nature took the place of the divine as the means of 'knowing' the body.

[80]. Scott, p. 24.

[81]. Quoted in Wandor (1990), p. 67.

[82]. I am not suggesting that this strategy is not effective, but am questioning the way in which the ground upon which these numbers coalesced was constituted.

[83]. As Stuart Hall states (1991b), pp. 52 - 53 '[...] people have to find some ground, some place, some position on which to stand.' I will return to this in Chapter 7.

[84]. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1984), p. 112.

[85]. Quoted in Wandor (1980), p. 67.

[86]. Scott, p. 26.

Chapter 4

[1]. Butler (1992), p. 14.

[2]. See Dolan (1989), 58 - 71, for a useful contextualisation of the split between feminists which arose as a result of increased poststructuralist /postmodernist feminist theorizing.

[3]. Nicole Ward Jouve, *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 7, quoted in Diane Elam, p. 71.

[4]. Sabina Lovibond, 'Feminism and Postmodernism', in *Postmodernism and Society*, ed. by Roy Boyne and Ali Rattansi (London: Macmillan 1990), pp. 154 - 86 (p. 161).

[5]. Judith Butler (1990), p. 1.

[6]. Chantal Mouffe, 'Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Democratic Politics', in Butler and Scott eds. (1992), pp. 369 - 84 (p. 382).

[7]. I am aware that I risk positing 'deconstruction' as an 'it' here, whereas in reality it remains a contested term and cannot even be strictly designated as a 'practice', with a set of known and ready-made rules. I use the term, then, while acknowledging that such use is itself problematic. Equally, although I locate 'deconstruction' within the general terms of postmodernism, this too is somewhat contentious, since some deconstructionists would not claim themselves to be postmodernists. However, I do think that both deconstruction and poststructuralism are indicators of the social, political and cultural shift that has come to be nominated by the troubled term 'postmodernism'.

[8]. Dick Hebdige, 'Postmodernism and 'the other side'' in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morely and Kuan-Hsing Chan (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 174 - 200, p. 174.. Originally appeared in *Journal of Communication Inquiry* (1986), 10.2, 78 - 98.

[9]. Ibid, p. 175.

[10]. Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), p. 5.

[11]. Diane Elam, p. 67.

[12]. Diane Elam writes that she wants to 'abandon an easy symmetry between the terms and concede that at times 'feminism' becomes dislodged from 'deconstruction.' Ibid.

[13]. See for instance Deborah Cameron. *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (London: Macmillan Press. 1992), p. 185.

[14]. Diane Elam, p. 28.

[15]. See Diane Elam, p. 30.

[16]. Ibid., p. 32.

[17]. Ibid.

[18]. Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 88.

[19]. Trinh Minh-ha, 'Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Woman and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference', in *Making Face, Making Soul, Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, ed. by Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation, 1990), pp. 371 - 75 (p. 372).

[20]. Minh-ha (1989), p. 94.

[21]. Peggy Phelan (1993a), p. 6.

[22]. Diane Elam, p. 69.

[23]. Butler (1992), p. 16.

[24]. Diane Elam, p. 77.

[25]. Ibid.

[26]. Ibid., p. 78.

[27]. See Diane Elam, p. 87.

[28]. Flax (1990), p. 221.

[29]. Diane Elam, p. 120.

[30]. Ibid.

[31]. Ibid., p. 108.

[32]. This is similar to Lyotard's notion of rules which are 'metascriptives [...] limited in time and space', which will be eventually cancelled. (p. 66.).

[33]. Diane Elam, p. 115. One aspect of this concept of 'negotiation' seems to me, however, to have been overlooked. Negotiation assumes two equal parties being willing to negotiate. Such an assumption does not consider the inequality of power that will be brought to the 'negotiating table'. Even if the

formation of coalitions based on differences serves to combat this inequality by strengthening those presumed to be marginalised, how can one ensure that the strongest members of the coalition do not silence other members, thereby returning difference to Sameness? Elam's 'vision', then, must necessarily assume in advance that 'difference' is regarded favourably. How one arrives at this position, though, is left unaddressed.

[34]. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 143.

[35]. I think I saw this performance live in 1989 at the CCA.

[36]. Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Exact Change, 1993).

[37]. Bobby Baker, 'Food Is My Own Language', in *Live: Food For the Soul, A New Generation of British Theatre Makers*, David Tushingham (Great Britain: Methuen Drama, 1995), pp. 25 - 41 (p. 32). Tushingham goes on to assert that this position 'assumes [...] a definition of being an artist which is rather draconian, perhaps not especially useful in human terms. Baker replies, 'I don't agree. It assumes that the artist is an independent individual with the freedom of self-expression - which does not tally up with the traditional view of a mother.'

[38]. Philip Auslander, 'Vito Acconci and the Politics of the Body in Postmodern Performance', in *After the Future: Postmodern Times and Place* , ed. by Gary Shapiro (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 185 - 95 (p. 189).

[39]. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 58 - 59. [Italics mine.]

[40]. The confession, then, is like performance art - in performance art the speaking subject is also the subject (object) of the performance. And, like the confession, the performance needs a spectator.

[41]. Foucault, op. cit., pp. 61 - 62. To what, though, is she confessing, and from what is she seeking absolution? Is she confessing to being a 'working mother' i.e. a mother who produces art, or is she confessing to being an artist, who, since she has become a mother, no longer makes art?

[42]. Lucy Baldwyn, 'Blending In: The Immaterial Art of Bobby Baker's Culinary Events', *TDR*, 40.4 (1996), 37 - 55 (p. 51).

[43]. Deborah Lupton, *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 1.

[44]. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leons Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

[45]. Lupton, p. 3.

[46]. Ibid., p. 2.

[47]. Of course, this reading of 'family' is based on heterosexual, hegemonic notions of what constitutes the 'family' - a reading which Baker conforms to - man, woman, husband, wife, child(ren). Such conceptions of the family are continuously being contested as more 'families' are becoming 'single parent' families, 'same sex' families and alternative 'families', such as those of the gay community which are not 'blood tied' families.

[48]. Lupton, p. 28. At the interview for my present job, it was requested that all five candidates meet the Head of the School for dinner. We chose our seating locations ourselves, and it resulted in three males on one side of the table and three females on the other. We then ordered dinner, and it transpired that

all of the men had ordered steaks, while the three women had chosen the vegetarian option. I am not suggesting that this points to some essential difference in the eating patterns of males and females. (although there is a supposedly 'scientific' arguments that suggests that males require more iron). merely that there is perhaps some cultural conditioning which would result in these different choices.

[49]. Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (London: Virago Press, 1990), p. 152.

[50]. Grosz (1990), p. 203.

[51]. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 1985a), p. 215.

[52]. Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 98.

[53]. Kristeva, p. 1.

[54]. Ibid., p. 2.

[55]. Lupton, p. 47.

[56]. Such an assumption has been challenged in this decade, however, since increasingly more women are choosing not to have children. This 'condition' of 'childlessness' has, in turn, been harnessed by the 'feminist backlash' to promote the idea that many women who made such a choice are now regretting it. The assumption behind this rhetoric, of course, is that by choosing not to have children they 'missed' out on their natural destiny.

[57]. Lupton, p. 53.

[58]. Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, in *A Doll's House and Other Plays* (London: Penguin Classics, 1987), p. 204.

[59]. Charcot, quoted in Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830 - 1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 154.

[60]. Freud, p. 144.

[61]. Baldwyn, p. 51.

[62]. Stuart Hall (1991b), p. 49.

[63]. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1984a), p. 159.

[64]. Articles focusing on autobiographical performance include John Howell, 'Solo in Soho: The Performer Alone', *PAJ*, 4.1 & 2 (1979/80), 152 - 58; Bonnie Marranca, 'The Self as Text: Uses of Autobiography in the Theatre (*Animations* as Model)', *PAJ*, 4.1 & 2 (1979/80), 85 - 105; Bonnie Marranca, 'Performance World, Performance Culture', *PAJ*, 10.3 (1987), 21 - 28; William W. Demastes, 'Spalding Gray's *Swimming to Cambodia* and the Evolution of an Ironic Presence', *Theatre Journal*, 41 (1989), 75 - 94; John Brockway Schmor, 'Confessional Performance: Postmodern Culture in Recent American Theatre', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 9.2 (1994), 157 - 72. The most recent edition of *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 10, 1 - 2 (1999), addresses the performing of autobiography. Unfortunately, this volume appeared too late to be considered here.

[65]. I use the so-called 'generic' term here specifically because that subject who is capable of 'knowing' is historically male (and of course white 'etc.').

[66]. Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993a), p. 5

[67]. Ibid., pp. 7 - 8.

[68]. Ibid., p. 8. Examples of such 'teleological autobiographies' remain prevalent today, such as the autobiography of the 'star' which 'reveals' the path that led them to where they are today - usually embedded in a rhetoric of 'I succeeded against the odds, "rags to riches" story' (and I use that word advisedly). Alternatively, autobiographical writings can serve to 'explain' the motivational cues for a subject's inappropriate behaviour - why they acted in the way they did. Here, the promise is of getting inside the mind of the subject in order to understand him/her. In most of these cases, implicit within the writing, is a gesture of apology and an appeal for forgiveness. Interestingly, there has been a recent debate circulating around the notion of 'criminals' making money out of their activities, and a law has been passed to prevent this, unless such writing is perceived to be 'in the public's interest'. This debate has also stretched to the question of biographies, and 'factual based movies', and questioning whether it is ethical to pay 'criminals' for their 'stories'. There is, additionally, some slippery ground between the 'autobiography' and 'biography', since frequently the 'autobiography' is produced by a 'ghost writer' (an extremely interesting concept), prompting a questioning of the supposed distinction between the two categories. This slippage can also be applied to autobiographical performances, since the performance act is often shaped by external subjects, such as a director, producer, and designer. Baker herself has stated that she works with a director (see Tushingham, p.34). How autobiographical can a performance be when it is influenced by others external to the autobiography? These questions will be superseded by a destabilisation of the whole notion of the 'truth' of autobiography throughout this chapter.

[69]. Ibid., p. 9.

[70]. Butler (1990), p. 133.

[71]. Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice', in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Shari Benstock (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 34 - 62 (p. 39). Additionally, not only are women and minorities 'reminded' of their sex or colour, in certain contexts they are actively encouraged or, indeed, required to represent their marginalisation and nothing else, a point I will return to in Chapter 7.

[72]. Sidonie Smith (1993a), p. 13

[73]. See Shirley Neuman, '"An appearance of walking in a forest the sexes burn" Autobiography and the Construction of the Feminine Body', in *Autobiography and Postmodernism*, ed. by Kathleen Ashley, Leigh Gilmore, Gerald Peters (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp. 293 - 315.

[74]. Shari Benstock, pp. 10 - 33 (p. 14).

[75]. Betty Bergland, 'Postmodernism and the Autobiographical Subject: Reconstructing the "Other"', in Ashley ed., pp. 130 - 66 (p. 134).

[76]. Craig R Barclay, 'Schematization of autobiographical memory', in *Autobiographical Memory*, ed. David C Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 82 - 99 (p. 85).

[77]. Leigh Gilmore, 'Policing Truth: Confession, Gender, and Autobiographical Authority', in Ashley ed., pp. 54 - 78 (p. 55).

78. Ibid., pp. 55 - 57.

79. Sidonie Smith (1993a), p. 56.

80. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Pan Books, 1982), p. 211.

81. And, in fact, the present, as previously stated, is itself mediated in language so cannot be self-identical to its moment.

82. Sidonie Smith (1993a), p. 99.

83. See Sidonie Smith (1993a), p. 18.

84. Kim Worthington, *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 13.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

87. The split in the lesbian movement between S/M lesbians and radical lesbians is one case that springs to mind. S/M lesbians are frequently castigated by the wider lesbian movement for not behaving like 'proper lesbians' and indulging in male-identified sexual relationships. This will be explored later.

88. Another example of this is Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* (London: Penguin, 1966).

89. Worthington, pp. 181 - 82.

90. Sidonie Smith (1993a), p. 100.

91. Ibid.

92. Sidonie Smith (1993a), pp. 145 - 46.

93. Sidonie Smith (1993a), p. 146.

94. I think there is probably a hierarchy lurking here. The more personal and painful the performed experience, the more the spectator demands its authenticity. Thus, if a performer is drawing on his/her experiences of living with AIDS, or some other life-threatening disease, I would perceive it to be more immoral and unethical if it was later revealed that this performer was, in fact, 'healthy'. (I am uneasy about using this word, as it necessarily implies that all people with life-threatening conditions are 'unhealthy', rather than questioning the discursive power of such a nomination. However, I cannot think of another word to replace this one.) The condemnation that would follow would be much greater than if one simply felt 'cheated' or 'duped'. This whole 'authentic' vs 'fabricated' debate has proliferated recently with the rise in digital imaging technology which enables people to manipulate media images easily. However, although taking a slightly different track from the deliberate altering of images for the production of specific meanings, I would suggest that the binary between authentic/fabricated has always been erected on shaky territory, relating back to the previous chapter's discussion of the notion of knowledge, truth, and the 'real' - who gets to decide what is authentic or not, and how are such images made to mean? This is, again, not to deny the 'reality' of experiences, but to ask in what way they are able to signify.

[95]. Hutcheon, p. 44.

[96]. Baldwyn, p. 37.

[97]. See Baldwyn, p. 43.

[98]. Sidonie Smith (1993a), p. 131.

[99]. Although, as Peggy Phelan (1993a), and others have asserted, one can not trust totally what one sees.

[100]. I write `partially` since although Baker resists them she also actively inhabits them by having children, caring for and feeding them. Her resistances then are not so much aimed against the roles, as such, but against the prescriptions and parameters that currently accompany them.

[101]. Hutcheon, p. 142.

Chapter 5

[1]. Viewed live at CCA (1994).

[2]. Elinor Fuchs, `Staging the Obscene Body`, *TDR*, 33.1 (1989), 33 - 58 (pp. 46 - 47). Fuchs` statement is made in relation to a performance piece directed by Richard Schechner, entitled *Prometheus Project* (1985), in which Sprinkle appears as a `nurse`. However, the quote serves equally well for the performance *Post Post Porn Modernist*, in that Sprinkle is still the `other` woman.

[3]. I am reminded, here, of Diane Elam`s warning (p. 21), that `it would be misguided to believe that once a binary opposition has been deconstructed it remains deconstructed forever. That would presuppose that either there is some kind of natural identity that hides behind the false differentiation imposed by the binary or that the removal of the binary leaves us in undifferentiated, neutral metaphysical bliss`.

[4]. See Gerry Harris, `The I of the Beholder: Annie Sprinkle Revisited`, in Heathfield ed., for a discussion of the resistance between the `real` mother/Oedipal Mother within this performance.

[5]. Although, in recent years, what was known as the `new` and `different` is increasingly becoming more prevalent as other Glasgow venues, such as the Tramway, the Tron, and the Arches also now book the `new` and the `cutting edge`, which would suggest that the `new` is perhaps becoming the `old`, and that this `cutting edge` is no longer quite so sharp.

[6]. Carr, p. 255.

[7]. See Chapter 3 and my critique of Jesse Helms` actions in relation to the `NEA Four`.

[8]. The presence of these would contravene the `public decency` law.

[9]. As a `loyal` CCA attendee I am always struck by the loyalty of other attendees – everytime I go to this venue, I see the same people. However, it was notable that this show `sold-out`, which is not a regular occurrence.

[10]. Quoted in Shannon Bell. *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1994). p. 148.

[11]. Thanks to Greg Giesekam for drawing my attention to this.

[12]. Sprinkle, quoted in *Angry Women* ed. by Andrea Juno and Valerie Vale (San Francisco: Re/Search Publications 13, San Francisco, 1991). p. 27.

[13]. See Chris Straayer. `The Seduction of Boundaries: Feminist Fluidity in Annie Sprinkle`s Art/Education/Sex`, in *Dirty Looks: Women, Power, Pornography*. ed. by Pamela Church Gibson and Roman Gibson (London: BFI Publishing. 1993), pp. 156 - 75 (p. 157).

[14]. Judith Butler. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge. 1993). p. 3.

[15]. Performance artist Carla Kirkwood`s *Many Women Involved (MWI)*. Franklin Furnace (1995). viewed on video documentation, suggests the same, explicating the ways in which women are separated into the `good` or the `bad`, with the `bad` being used as a threat to ensure the `good`. However. what is revealed in the performance is that. although the subject of the `story` is nominated a `good girl` by those who `care` for her. such a nomination does not stop the `good girl` being sexually abused by a male member of her family. When this girl finally retaliates with the words `You get your fuckin` hand off my leg or I`ll scream so loud everyone in the house`ll wake up`. the perpetrator responds `What you talking like that for. You`re gonna turn out just like Sharon`. Sharon is the narrator`s cousin. a prostitute. a `bad girl`. At the end of the performance. a series of slides of women`s faces is shown. Kirkwood speaks the following words: `Using the division. The sorting out of the good and the bad as reason for somebody getting away with murder. Each woman murdered. a face. a daughter. a cousin. a human. a woman. ... A woman`s life is a human life. We asked our friends - stand in for a woman. give her a face. And they did. I look at each face and study it ... as if it were my own [...] because to each murderer. we`re all the same.` She then reads out women`s names. their sex and age. The performance ends with the repetition of `To those who murder us. we are all the same`.

[16]. See for example *Pornography and Sexual Violence: Evidence of the Links* (London: Everywoman. 1988). which is a transcript of public hearings about pornography`s link to sexual violence against women. held by Minneapolis City Council. In this book. MacKinnon defines pornography as `the graphic. sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures or words. that also includes women dehumanised as sexual objects. things or commodities. enjoying pain or humiliation or rape. being tied up. cut up. mutilated. bruised or physically hurt. in postures of sexual submission or servility or display. reduced to body parts. penetrated by objects or animals. or presented in scenarios of degradation. injury. torture. shown as filthy or inferior. bleeding. bruised. or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual` (p. 2). See also Andrea Dworkin. *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: Women`s Press. 1981). Susan Griffin. *Pornography and Silence* (London: The Women`s Press. 1981). and *Pornography: Women. Violence and Civil Liberties*. ed. by Catherine Itzin (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1992). Other feminists resist the notion of censorship. perceiving it to be a tool of the hegemony which will censor other materials produced by lesbians and gay men. See *Women Against Censorship*. ed. by Varda Burstyn (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntryre. 1985).

[17]. Linda Williams. `A Provoking Agent - The Pornography and Performance Art of Annie Sprinkle`. in Gibson and Gibson eds., pp. 176 - 189 (p. 178).

[18]. Butler (1990). p. 7.

[19]. Butler (1993). p. 5.

[20]. Butler (1990). p. 18.

[21]. Ibid., p. 24.

[22]. Ibid., p. 25.

[23]. Ibid., p. 33.

[24]. Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. by Diana Fuss (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 13 - 31 (p. 28).

[25]. Butler, ibid., p. 21.

[26]. Butler (1990), p. 139 and p. 145.

[27]. Ibid., p. 147. However, it is important to note that Butler is not suggesting that gender can be taken off or put on at will, for gendering of any subject takes place in an already gendered society, where the rules of the gendering already exist, and the penalties and prohibitions for doing one's gender 'wrong' are severe. It is, then, a '*compulsory* performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishments, and violence [....]' (1991), p. 24.

[28]. This two-sex model is itself a historically located construction. See Laquer.

[29]. Suzanne J. Kessler, 'The Medical Construction of Gender: Case Management of Intersexed Infants', *Signs* 16.1 (1990), cited in Diane Elam, p. 51.

[30]. Annie Sprinkle, in Juno and Vale eds., p. 24.

[31]. Williams, p. 179.

[32]. The difference, perhaps, is that Annie Sprinkle chose the name 'Annie Sprinkle' herself.

[33]. Minh-ha (1990), p. 375. See also Butler (1993), p. 3.

[34]. Gerry Harris [n.p.].

[35]. Jacquelyn Zita, 'Pornography and the Male Imaginary', *Enclitic*, 9, 28 - 44. Quoted in Fuchs (1989), p. 51.

[36]. Of course, many women are positioned in the space of the signifier 'whore' without actually consciously 'becoming' the whore, when the signifier is used not as a descriptive term (the woman who exchanges sex for money), but specifically as a controlling term (which *does* reveal the system's operating structure - a performative, pejorative term that marks the body of the one thus named).

[37]. Williams, p. 187.

[38]. Schneider, p. 96.

[39]. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985b).

[40]. Gerry Harris [n.p.].

[41]. Reprinted in Shannon Bell, p. 152.

[42]. Williams, p. 180.

[43]. Butler (1990), p. 145.

[44]. Williams, p.181.

[45]. Rose Illet, 'Deconstructing Disability: The Performance Work of Annie Sprinkle', in *Art and Design: Performance Art Into The 90s*, Profile No. 38 (1994), pp. 82 - 85 (p. 84).

[46]. Although, of course, the sexuality on display may trouble this nomination as 'human' since it is outwith the concept of 'normative heterosexuality', and may therefore be positioned as debased, returning it to the non-human.

[47]. Straayer (1993), p. 165. She goes on to say that 'Exhibiting sodomy within heterosexuality, she probes the legal/semantic basis by which heterosexuality is constructed as a default class in opposition to "sodomites".' (p. 174.)

[48]. See the interview in Juno for a perfect example of Sprinkle's sex positive views (pp. 23 - 40).

[49]. Quoted in Juno, p. 33. And how do we read 'evolve' here? Does it suggest 'progress', as in 'evolution' - which could be seen to be a very modernist concept? With each 'state' are we getting nearer the 'best'?

[50]. Ibid.

[51]. Quoted in Shannon Bell, p. 153.

[52]. However, being 'sacred' may not actually have altered many of the material conditions of the prostitutes and this retelling is perhaps somewhat idealistic.

[53]. Ibid., p. 154.

[54]. Schneider (pp. 23 - 25; p. 60), chooses to read the performance as a 'postmodern parody of a modernist aesthetic - a doubling back over modernist canonical obsession with the explicit female body, and explicitly the prostitute's body, as a primary foundation for the erection of high modern identity'.

[55]. Gerry Harris [n.p.].

[56]. What am I seeking by offering this confession? Absolution? Understanding? Empathy? Humiliation?

[57]. Gerry Harris [n.p.].

[58]. It is six years since I saw this performance, and I have read and thought about it a lot since then. It is difficult, in 2000, to remember precisely how I felt, but I remember what I did not do in the performance, and my self-analysis here is grounded on those non-actions.

[59]. Of course I, too, could choose to produce my own ground, performing the same resistances to a fixed identity as Sprinkle. At the time of watching this performance, however, such an option seemed impossible. In this sense, Sprinkle's fluidity could be seen to be inspirational.

[60]. Of course, the person in the interview may be just another extension of the performance persona of Annie Sprinkle. I am not suggesting that such interviews allow us to 'access' the 'real' Annie Sprinkle - because, as I've tried to argue throughout, this is an impossible task. This interview, however, does indicate a 'shift' that is worth marking.

[61]. Annie Sprinkle, quoted in Hohmann, p. 29.

[62]. Quoted in *Diva* (February 1996), 39 - 41.

[63]. I have never seen this performance, and base my reading of it on a textual analysis of the printed script, in *Out From Under: Texts by Women Performance Artists*, ed. by Lenora Champagne (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1990), pp. 59 - 70. It is also printed in Carol Martin ed. (1996), pp. 293 - 303. I also draw on the printed documentation of others' reactions to the performance. This analysis, then, is not grounded in my own spectatorship.

[64]. Karen Finley, quoted in *The New York Times*, July 22 1990, H, 5 - 6.

[65]. I base this information on my viewing of another of Finley's performances, *A Certain Level of Denial*, in which her comments to the audience were specific to the location of the performance, in this instance, the ICA in London (1995), and on other critics' comments about Finley's performance.

[66]. In 'An Interview With Karen Finley', by Richard Schechner, in Carol Martin ed., pp. 254 - 63 (p. 259); originally published in *TDR*, 32.1 (1988), 152 - 58.

[67]. Patraka, p. 171.

[68]. See Patraka, p. 178.

[69]. Jon Erickson, 'Appropriation and Transgression in Contemporary American Performance: The Wooster Group, Holly Hughes, and Karen Finley', *Theatre Journal*, 42.2 (1990), 225 - 36 (p. 231).

[70]. Maria T. Pramaggiore, 'Resisting/Performing/Femininity: Words, Flesh, and Feminism in Karen Finley's *The Constant State of Desire*', *Theatre Journal*, 44.3 (1992), 269 - 90 (pp. 271 - 72).

[71]. Hereafter referred to as *TCSD*.

[72]. Karen Finley, in Schechner (1996), p. 256.

[73]. Karen Finley, in *TDR*, 34.2 (1990), p. 10.

[74]. Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 176.

[75]. Schneider, pp. 114 - 15.

[76]. Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 97.

[77]. Dolan (1988), p. 67.

[78]. Silverman, p. 164.

[79]. Patraka, p. 172.

80. Silverman, p. 191.

81. Pramaggiore, p. 274.

82. This double standard is evident in reactions directed towards women who *do* commit crimes - both violent and non-violent. The female criminal is judged not only for committing a crime against society, but also against 'nature' (her femininity), and is doubly chastised as a result.

83. Z. Isiling Nataf, 'Black Lesbian Spectatorship and Pleasure in Popular Cinema', in *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*, ed. by Paul Burston and Colin Richardson (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 57 - 80 (p. 65).

84. Solomon (1997), p. 22.

85. See Dolan (1988), pp. 65 - 66. See also Schneider, p. 104.

86. Ibid.

87. Karen Finley, in Schechner (1996), p. 258.

88. Ibid., p. 260.

89. Viewed live at the ICA (1995).

90. I am reminded here of the performances *Scrubbing* and *Ironing*, cited earlier.

91. Schneider, p. 99.

92. Peggy Phelan (1993a), p. 17. See also p. 5: The male is 'marked' because within the phallic economy he is marked with value. The female, however, 'is unmarked, lacking measured value and meaning. Within this psycho-philosophical frame, cultural reproduction takes she who is unmarked and re-marks her, rhetorically and imagistically, while he who is marked with value is left unremarked, in discursive paradigms and visual fields. He is the norm and therefore unremarkable: as the Other, it is she whom he marks.'

93. Ibid., p. 30.

94. Ibid., p. 101.

95. Greg Giesekam suggested that this wearing of the beak is perhaps a replaying of the Greek myths of Itys and Philomela, in which the female figures are turned into birds. Philomela also embroiders a piece of cloth to inform her sister of her situation. In the performance, this is paralleled by Lee's use of the suit, and her unpicking of it, to send a message regarding the system of representation and woman's place within that.

96. Ibid., p. 2.

97. Ibid., p. 25.

98. Ibid., p. 33.

Chapter 6

[1]. Butler (1990), pp. 5 - 6.

[2]. Programme Notes for Jezebel, 9 September - 7 October 1995, ICA.

[3]. Viewed on video. Originally performed at Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago (1994).

[4]. Viewed live at 'Franklin Furnace in Exile', Dixon Place, NY (1996).

[5]. See Tamsin Wilton, *Lesbian Studies: Setting an Agenda* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 22 - 23.

[6]. See, for example, renée hoogland, *Lesbian Configurations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 5: 'What makes a text into a lesbian one? Must the author be a lesbian to make it so? And what if she is "known" to be a lesbian, but does not explicitly deal with the subject in her work? Does that still qualify as a "lesbian"? And what about language? Does sexuality enter into the ways we speak and write? Is there such a thing as lesbian writing, even a lesbian aesthetic, as distinct from a gay male, a female or feminist one? And finally, how are we to approach the role of the reader/critic? To what extent do critics determine what counts as lesbian and what not? And if they do, does this mean that any text may be read from a lesbian perspective?' See also Freeman, p. 8.

[7]. Lynda Hart, 'Identity and Seduction: Lesbians in the Mainstream', in Hart and Phelan eds. (1993), pp. 119 - 37 (p. 128).

[8]. Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1995a), pp. 220 - 21.

[9]. Patricia Ticineto Clough, *Feminist Thought: Desire, Power, and Academic Discourse* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 142 - 143.

[10]. Note, however, Wilton's critique (1995a, p. 93), of this oft-quoted phrase: 'Even the much-quoted Ti-Grace Atkinson remark "Feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice" is, according to Abbot and Love [...] a misreading of something Atkinson said during a paper presented to DOB [Daughters of Bilitis], in which she questioned whether it was possible for lesbians and feminists to work together. Her remark, "Feminism is a theory; but lesbianism is a practice" was intended to demonstrate that lesbianism, being a sexual practice and hence neither theoretical nor political, was incompatible with feminism, which was both.'

[11]. hoogland, pp. 12 - 13.

[12]. Monique Wittig would contest that lesbians are 'women', a point I will pick up in a minute.

[13]. Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 20 and 32.

[14]. Some lesbians are not read as female since they 'pass' as male, which, if this is an undeliberate passing, poses different problems, but problems none the less. Most lesbians do not want to 'be' men, and the 'style' that they choose to wear is not an attempt to mimic 'man', but is a deliberate lesbian signification.

[15]. Hilary Harris, 'Toward a Lesbian Theory of Performance: Refunctioning Gender', in Hart and Phelan eds. (1993), pp. 257 - 276 (p. 261).

[16]. Holly Hughes, quoted in Walters (1996), p. 862.

[17]. Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* ed. by Carole S. Vance (London: Routledge, 1984), pp. 267 - 319 (p. 308).

[18]. See Wilton (1995a), p. 100.

[19]. Ibid.

[20]. Dolan (1988), p. 192.

[21]. See Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* ed. by Ann Snitow et. Al. (London: Virago, 1984). While this article is important in that it locates heterosexuality as an ideological institution, it erases the 'lesbian' by naming all woman-to-woman relationships as belonging to a 'lesbian continuum.' See p.192: 'I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range - through each woman's life and throughout history - of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support; if we can also hear in it such associations as *marriage resistance* [...] - we begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology that have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of "lesbianism."'

[22]. Saxe also argues that sado-masochists are openly and actively antifeminist, because they publish jokes such as the following (and I deliberately reproduce here because I personally think it is quite funny), which appeared in *Coming to Power* (Samois, 1981, p. 146): 'Riddle: How many S/M dykes does it take to change a lightbulb? Answer: Two - one bottom to do it and one top to tell her what to do. Riddle: How many anti-S/M feminists does it take to screw in a lightbulb? Answer: At least four. One to handle the bulb, one to critique the word 'screw', one to lend professional credentials to the operation, and one to find common ground with the utility company.' Lorena Leigh Saxe, 'Sadomasochism and Exclusion', in *Hypatia*, 7.4 (1992), 59 - 72 (p. 64). For other views on S/M lesbian practice see Patrick D Hopkins, 'Rethinking Sadomasochism: Feminism, Interpretation, and Simulation', *Hypatia*, 9.1 (1994); Lynda Hart, 'Doing it Anyway: Lesbian sado-masochism and performance', in Diamond ed. (1996), pp. 46 - 61.

[23]. Joan Nestle, 'The Fem Question', in Vance ed., pp. 232 - 42 (p. 234).

[24]. David Woolhead, '"Surveillant Gays": HIV, space and the constitution of identities', in *Mapping Desire*, ed. by David Bell & Gill Valentine (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 231 - 44 (p. 237).

[25]. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 6 - 7.

[26]. Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*, (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1993) p. 296.

[27]. Not all transsexuals are 'outwith' this matrix, however, as they are reinserted into it by being categorised pre-operatively as 'gender-dysfunctional'. Post-operatively, their bodies and genders are re-aligned, and they can supposedly fit back into the heterosexual paradigm - as 'properly' feminine or masculine. Interestingly, it is their bodies which are transformed and their genders which remain unchanged - evidence again that gender is located as the primary (fixed) ground for a coherent and stable identity.

[28]. Kate Bornstein, quoted in Shannon Bell, 'Kate Bornstein: A Transgender Transsexual Postmodern Tiresias', in *The Last Sex: Feminism and Outlaw Bodies*, ed. by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (New York: St. Martins Press, 1993), pp. 104 - 20 (p. 116).

[29]. Butler (1991), p. 15.

[30]. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.6.

[31]. Ibid., p. 8.

[32]. Jacob Hale, 'Are Lesbians Women', *Hypatia*, 11.2 (1996), 94 - 121 (p. 100).

[33]. See Liz Kotz, 'An Unrequited Desire for the Sublime: Looking at Lesbian Representation Across the Works of Abigail Child, Cecilia Dougherty, and Su Friedrich', in *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, ed. by Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 86 - 102 (p. 87). 'Tendencies by lesbian and gay critics to posit heterosexuality as far more monolithic than it is, and "marginal sexualities" as far more "oppositional" than they may be, may actually reinforce dominant cultural beliefs in the inherent and essential separateness of lesbian and gay sexuality and desire, rather than challenging these dyadic terms.'

[34]. Gayatri Spivak, quoted in Hart (1993), p. 128. Hart goes on to cite Judith Butler's unease even with this 'strategic essentialism,' as for Butler 'strategies also have meanings that exceed the purposes for which they are intended.' (1990, p. 4.)

[35]. Butler (1991), p.14.

[36]. Ibid., p. 19.

[37]. Diana Fuss, quoted in Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics - Queer Reading* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 71.

[38]. Foucault, p. 106.

[39]. See Diana Fuss ed., *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 1 - 10. 'For heterosexuality to achieve the status of the "compulsory," it must present itself as a practice governed by some internal necessity. The language and law that regulates the establishment of heterosexuality as both an identity and an institution, both a practice and a system, is the language and law of defence and protection: heterosexuality secures its self-identity and shores up its ontological boundaries by protecting itself from what it sees as the continual predatory encroachment of its contaminated other, homosexuality. [...] But the binary structure of sexual orientation, fundamentally a structure of exclusion and exteriorisation, nonetheless constructs that exclusion by prominently including the contaminated other in its oppositional logic. The homo in relation to the hetero, much like the feminine in relation to the masculine, operates as an indispensable interior exclusion - an outside with is inside interiority making the articulation of the latter possible, a transgression of the border which is necessary to constitute the border as such.' (pp. 2 - 3.)

[40]. Elizabeth Grosz (1995a), p. 210.

[41]. Shane Phelan, '(Be)Coming Out: Lesbian Identity and Politics', *Signs*, 18.4 (1993), 765 - 90, (p. 771).

[42]. Sedgwick, p. 8.

[43]. Clough, p. 145.

[44]. See Butler (1990) and (1993).

[45]. Sedgwick, p. 9.

[46]. See Biddy Martin, p. 106.

[47]. See Sedgwick, p. 9, and Moe Meyer ed., *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 3. 'Broadening the scope of the queer critique in this manner also constitutes a radical challenge to the entire concept of an identity based upon sexual orientation or sexual desire because the substitution of a performative, discontinuous self for one based upon the unique individual actually displaces and voids the concept of sexual orientation itself by removing the bourgeois epistemological frames that stabilise such identifications. Queer sexualities become, then, a series of improvised performances whose threat lies in the denial of any social identity derived from participation in those performances.'

[48]. Sedgwick, p. 8.

[49]. Grosz (1995a), Notes 1, p. 250.

[50]. Diane Elam, p. 108.

[51]. Biddy Martin, p. 119.

[52]. Jacqueline N Zita, 'Male Lesbians and the Postmodernist Body', *Hypatia*, 7.4 (1992), 106 - 27 (p. 126). Also: 'What I am suggesting is that the stubborn return of the body's sex, its "maleness" in this case, is nothing more than a hegemonically overdetermined set of readings made apparently "continuous" and "natural" by their seriality, redundancy, and consistency that confer "a sex" on the body without regard to the will or authorship of the subject. These meanings are perhaps metaphysically and historically contingent, utterly constructed and arbitrary, but encumbering.' (p.125.)

[53]. Jay Plum, 'Pleasure, Politics and the Performance of Community: Pomo Afro Homo's Dark Fruit', *Modern Drama*, 39.1 (1996), 117 - 131 (p. 118).

[54]. Walters (1996), p. 856.

[55]. Miguel Gutirrez, quoted in 'Queer/Nation' ed. by Allan Bérubé and Jeffrey Escoffier, in *Outlook - National Lesbian and Gay Quarterly*, 11 (1991), p. 16.

[56]. This has been contested by some feminist critics, such as Walters (1996), who suggests that some 'queer theorists' have miscast 'feminists' as the 'bad others', setting themselves up in opposition to them.

[57]. This reading was suggested during a discussion with my partner Rachel who noted the fact that lesbians tend to have 'gay' male friends rather than straight male friends, because the 'gay man' is not threatening to them.

[58]. Thanks to my supervisor Greg Giesekam for suggesting this 'erasure' of the term.

[59]. Many thanks to Greg for spotting this.

60. Another absence in my writing around this performance is the play of desire. As I did not see the performance live, I do not know whether there was a dynamic of desire circulating in the space. I will address the presence of desire in the next section of this chapter.

61. Franklin Furnace was in 'exile' due to having been closed down by the Fire Department following an anonymous call stating that the 15 year-old performance space was an illegal social club.

62. I have chosen to focus only on this section as it explicitly deals with 'lesbian sexuality'. However, Loomis' entire performance was extremely interesting with all sections circulating around the notion of subjectivity and identity. While there could be seen to be a thread linking each section they remained self-contained pieces.

63. Grosz (1995a), p. 221.

64. This excerpt comes from a script of the performance, provided by Loomis.

65. Freud, p. 376.

66. While Freud insists that he is not normalising heterosexuals over homosexuals since both identities are in need of explanations, he does continue to refer to 'normal' female sexuality throughout his writings.

67. Wilton (1995a), pp. 71 - 72.

68. Butler (1990), p. 60.

69. Freud, p. 351 - 2.

70. Butler (1991), p. 22.

71. Ibid.

72. Op. Cit., p. 23.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. See the chapter 'The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary' in Butler (1993).

76. See Butler (1991) and (1993).

77. See Butler (1991), p. 15.

78. Ibid, p. 16.

79. I mean this both in terms of feeling 'bliss' (see Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990)), and in the more radical sense suggested by Luce Irigaray of the 'feminine *jouissance*', a specific female representation of the unconscious and desire, the real 'lack' within psychoanalytic discourse, and that which is excluded from the Symbolic Order but which exists nonetheless. See Irigaray (1995a).

[80]. Returning again to the printed text of this performance, after writing this chapter, I realise that the material of the jacket is never denoted, although in my own mind I saw it as leather. My own desire, then, is written in my writing of this chapter, although I am not conscious of it.

[81]. This return to the desire within the performance is prompted by Elizabeth Grosz (1995a, pp. 179 - 83), who - following Spinoza - figures desire as productive rather than negative: 'As production, desire does not provide blueprints, models, ideals, or goals. Rather, it experiments: it makes: it is fundamentally aleatory, inventive. [...] Sexuality and desire, then, are not fantasies, wishes, hopes, aspirations [...] but are energies, excitations, impulses, actions, movements, practices, moments, pulses of feeling.'

Chapter 7

[1]. Lorde, p. 129.

[2]. Of course, there is a sense in which I feel I 'know' the white heterosexual female because her voice has historically been the dominant female one within both academic discourse and the mass media (although, of course, the 'female' here has often been the female as seen through the eyes of the male).

[3]. The important question is 'What do I do when there is no identification? What happens when the performer is not talking about/to me?'

[4]. Brah, p. 205.

[5]. The 'Other' here refers to those specifically and necessarily positioned on the margins, enabling the production and maintenance of a system of domination in which the One is the dominant term/subject. Amongst the 'Others', then, are women, homosexuals, and black people.

[6]. Schneider, p. 137.

[7]. Quoted in Peggy Phelan (1993a), p. 7.

[8]. Viewed at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 1996. Eight years after its inception, it remains a powerful and provocative piece.

[9]. Perhaps this is slightly disingenuous, however, since the popular press does pick up on provocative art, and the adverse publicity that is produced as a result, although adverse, does serve to bring the artist into the limelight, which may help their career. See, for example, Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ*. Karen Finley discredits this notion, however, as explored earlier - she denies that the controversy created was in any way positive for her as an artist.

[10]. Harvette Mullen, 'Optic White: Blackness and the Production of Whiteness', *Diacritics*, 24.2 - 3 (1994), 71 - 89 (p. 72).

[11]. Mullen, p. 72. An interesting point raised in this same article is that other European subjects who 'passed' as Anglo-Saxon whites (the only 'proper' white subject) were perceived not to have 'passed' but to have assimilated. For Mullen, 'passing' is 'not so much a wilful deception of duplicity as it is an attempt to move from the margin to the center of American identity.' Since very few African-Americans have been able to make this move, those who have 'passed' are not regarded as having assimilated to 'white values' but as being 'inauthentic'. Those who manage to pass for white are only those who are indistinguishable from whites, who instead of '"passing for" white, [...] become white or function as white, which amounts to the same thing when their participation in the normal activities of mainstream Americans is enabled by the perception that they are white.' p. 77.

[12]. Alastair Bonnett, *Radicalism, Anti-Racism and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 6.

[13]. Brah, p. 99.

[14]. Ugwu, *Let's Get It On*, p. 11.

[15]. Stuart Hall (1991b), p. 53.

[16]. See Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Ethnicity, Gender Relations and Multi-culturalism', in *Debating Cultural Hybridity - Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. by Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (London: Zed Books, 1997), pp. 193 - 208 (p. 203).

[17]. Ibid., pp. 204 - 06.

[18]. Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *Black Film British Cinema*, ed. by Kobena Mercer (London: ICA Documents 7, 1988), pp. 27 - 31(p. 29).

[19]. Stuart Hall, ibid.

[20]. See Stuart Hall (1991b), pp. 50 - 57.

[21]. Stuart Hall, ibid., p. 65.

[22]. See Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Goldberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271 - 313.

[23]. Stuart Hall, 'When Was the "Post-Colonial"? Thinking at the Limit', in *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. by Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996a), pp. 242 - 60 (p. 248 - 49).

[24]. Stuart Hall (1991a), p. 38.

[25]. Stuart Hall (1988), p. 30.

[26]. Stuart Hall (1991b), pp. 52 - 53.

[27]. I mark this term because it depends on where one is located as to whether one belongs to the 'majority' or the 'minority'. Of course, in colonial contexts, the oppressor was a minority. However, the term 'minority' is also problematic in that it literally suggests a minor. See Brah pp. 186 - 90, and Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 270 for more on this.

[28]. Stuart Hall, 'What is this 'black' in popular culture?', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996b), pp. 465 - 75 (p. 472).

[29]. Viewed on video documentation. Performed live at the CCA (1995), as a double bill with *Ladies Falling*.

[30]. Stuart Hall (1988), p. 36.

[31]. Yuval-Davis, p. 200.

[32]. Viewed live at 'Franklin Furnace in Exile'. Dixon Place (1996).

[33]. Minh-ha (1989). pp. 88 - 9.

[34]. Excerpt from the performance script.

[35]. It is possible that Jackson suffers from a skin condition which causes his pigmentation to whiten, as he himself has asserted. This could also be interpreted, then, from the opposite direction - Jackson is made into a 'freak' by the Western (white) media who wish to undermine his huge popularity and following.

[36]. And as she thanked me for being there, for coming, I also asked myself why I had come? To taste a bit of the authentic? To capture a slice of 'black performance art'? To get a bit of the 'other'? I knew, watching the performance, before the performance even, that at some point in this thesis I would address the issues of black female performers. Did I just attend this performance, then, because Russell is an African-American performer and I was hoping to get my money's worth? Would I have gone had I not been doing a PhD? How many performances by black women have I not cited because they do not illuminate, reveal or support anything I am writing about or exploring here?

[37]. See, for example, Stuart Hall (1996a, p. 252). '[U]nder the universalising panoptic eye of the Enlightenment, all forms of human life were brought within the universal scope of single order of being, so that difference had to be re-cast into the constant marking and re-marking of positions within a single discursive system (*différance*). This process was organised by those shifting mechanisms of "otherness", alterity and exclusion and the tropes of fetishism and pathologisation, which were required if "difference" was ever to be fixed and consolidated within a "unified" discourse of *civilisation*.'

[38]. See Catherine Hall, 'Histories, Empires and the Post-Colonial Moment', in Chambers and Curtis eds., pp. 65 - 77 (pp. 71 - 76).

[39]. Stuart Hall (1991b), p. 49. Of course, one could accuse Hall of reducing 'Englishness' to a stereotype, but then all attempts to define 'nation' must ultimately draw on a strategy of reduction - of smoothing out the differences. Also, to his credit, with the first simple question 'what does anybody in the world know...?', Hall has succeeded in replacing the self-aggrandising image of the conquesting, colonialist 'Englishman' (and that word is used deliberately, since it is always an 'Englishman's' country, or house etc.) who sees himself at the centre of the Universe with a 'cup of tea'. The colonialist's ego is sharply deflated.

[40]. Viewed on video. Performed at CCA (1995).

[41]. See Stuart Hall (1996a), for a useful discussion of the ways in which the term 'post-colonialism' has been contested. Borrowing from this article, and in particular the quote included from Peter Hulme, I do not use the term 'post' to mean a definitive split from or coming after colonialism, but a '*process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome which takes many forms and is probably inescapable for all those whose worlds have been marked by that set of phenomena: "post-colonial" is (or should be) a descriptive not an evaluative term ... [It is not] some kind of badge of merit.' p. 246. Further, as Hall states, '"After" means in the moment which follows that moment (the colonial) in which the colonial relation was dominant. It does not mean, as we tried to show earlier, that what we have called the "after-effects" of colonial rule have somehow been suspended. It certainly does *not* mean that we have passed from a regime of power-knowledge into some powerless and conflict-free zone. Nevertheless, it does also stake its claim in terms of the fact that some other, related but as yet "emergent" new configurations of power-knowledge relations are beginning to exert their distinctive and specific effects.' p. 254.

[42]. Stuart Hall (1991b), p. 59.

[43]. Bhabha, p. 37.

[44]. Bhabha, pp. 227 - 28.

[45]. Viewed live at the NRLA, Arches (1994).

[46]. Viewed video documentation. Originally presented at Franklin Furnace (1995).

[47]. Viewed live at the Tramway (1998).

[48]. Mae Gwnedolyn Henderson, 'Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition', in Butler and Scott eds. (1992), pp. 144 - 66 (p. 146).

[49]. Ibid.

[50]. Henderson, p. 147.

[51]. Ibid.

[52]. Viewed live at the CCA (1994).

[53]. Barbara Christian, quoted in Henderson, p.147.

[54]. Mercer (1994), p. 65.

[55]. There is a difference here, I believe, between the performance artist or body artist who attempts to define the limits of the body, or to push the body beyond presumed limits, through using the body as the tool of art, and the woman who changes her body shape because of societal prescriptions. I am not suggesting that body alteration by an artist is of higher value because it is 'art' than body alteration for cosmetic purposes. What I am suggesting, however, is that the agency and motivation of the subject is very different in each case. While I have not got the space to discuss these differences in any depth here, I hope in the future to look at the work of performance artist Orlan since her work appears to raise many tensions and conflicts of emotion.

[56]. Written for a PhD paper in 1995.

[57]. Similarly, another performer, Leslie Hill, was given the nomination UK. In fact, at the time, Hill was an American PhD student studying in the UK. Such labelling surely reveals the difficulty in stating where one 'belongs', and the problematics of locationality, particularly in the tension between where one comes from and where one now is. Hill has since returned to the USA, and I wonder what nomination she now uses.

[58]. Henderson, p. 145.

[59]. Coco Fusco in discussion at the NRLA, CCA (1994).

[60]. See Bhabha, pp. 85 - 92.

[61]. bell hooks (1994). It was against such anti-black feelings that Black Pride had such an impact.

[62]. Of course there are exceptions to this, such as the increase in black super-models. However, these remain exceptions and I would suggest that as exceptions they are at an even greater risk of being

exoticised. Generally, cultural representations do not reflect the numbers of black people living in the Western world.

63. Discussion at the NRLA, CCA (1994).

64. Viewed live at the NRLA, CCA (1996).

65. Anna Deveare Smith, 'Introduction', in *Twilight Los Angeles, 1992* (New York: Anchor Book, Doubleday, 1994), p. xxv. Having seen the performance *Twilight* in 1996 in San Francisco I admire Smith's attempts to address the problems as outlined in this quotation within her work. However, as I nominate Smith a theatre performer rather than a performance artist (although there is a blur at the edges here). I have decided not to include an analysis of Smith's work here. For further information on Smith see 'Bearing Witness: Anna Deveare Smith from Community to Theatre to Mass Media', and an interview of Smith, both by Carol Martin ed., pp. 81 - 93 and pp. 185 - 204.

Conclusion

1. Adrienne Rich, 'Notes Towards a Politics of Location', in *Women, Feminist Identity and Society in the 1980s: Selected Papers*, ed. by Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz and Iris M. Zavala (Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1985), p. 16.

2. One fundamental change that has occurred since writing the bulk of this thesis is that I have moved from a large city to a 'city' with a population of 100,000. The material problems of living in a town, as a 'lesbian', has resulted in my return to another sort of politics. This shift in physical space has made the issue of context hugely important. Sometimes one has to insist on the signifier to prevent disappearance. While Phelan may write of the problems of 'visibility politics', actually becoming invisible feels as if one also becomes invisible to oneself. 'I' lose myself in my isolation and marginalisation. In place of '"I" as a construct' is 'I am not (even that)'.

3. Viewed at the NRLA, Arches, 1996.

4. Viewed at Tramway, 1998.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. PERFORMANCES

i) Viewed Live

Penny Arcade (Knitting Factory, 1996)
Elia Arce, *Stretching My Skin Until it Rips Whole* (ICA, 1995)
Ron Athey, *4 Scenes in a Harsh Life* (CCA, 1994)
Bobby Baker, *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* (CCA, 1989)
Bobby Baker, *Cook Dems* (Traverse, 1991)
Tanya Barfield, *Without Skin or Breathlessness* (PS122, 1996)
Alexander Billings, *Before I Disappear* (Bailiwick Repertory, 1996)
Marcie Blackman, *Sex and the Speaker* (Lunasea, 1996)
Nao Bustamante, *America, the Beautiful* (ICA, 1995)
Nao Bustamante and Coco Fusco, *Stuff* (CCA, 1996)
Patty Cachapero, *This is Where My Story Begins* (Brava, 1996)
Marissa Carr, *Dragon Lady* (ICA, 1995)
Maya Chowdhry, *The Sacred House* (Arches, 1994)
Drag King Spoken Word, various artists (Westbeth Theatre, 1996)
Becky Edmunds, *Blue Funk* (Tramway, 1998)
Karen Finley, *A Certain Level of Denial* (ICA, 1995)
Fuckorama, various artists (ATA, 1996)
Patricia Hoffbauer and Company, *Banana Splits* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996)
Julie Laffin, *Over* (Lunar Cabaret, 1996)
Rona Lee, *Avid Metamorphosis 1* (ICA, 1995)
Anita Loomis, *Female Deviations: Autobiographies of Desire* (Franklin Furnace/Dixon Place, 1996)
Salley May, *Blonde Suicide* (Franklin Furnace/Dixon Place, 1996)
Helen Paris, *Sniffing the Marigolds* (ICA, 1995)
Medea Project, *Buried Fire* (Lorraine Hansberry Project, 1996)
La Ribot, *Socorro! Gloria!* (ICA, 1995)
Dee Dee Russell, *The Adventures of Art Girl: Insane in San Francisco* (Franklin Furnace/Dixon Place, 1996)
Anne Seagrave, *Or Even What Leaving Was* (Third Eye Centre, 1990)
Pamela Sneed, *Imagine Being More Afraid of Freedom than Slavery* (CCA, 1994)
Annie Sprinkle, *Post Post Porn Modernist* (CCA, 1994)
Stelarc, *Host* (Arches, 1998)
Julie Tolentino, *Mestizo - Que Bonitos Ojos Tienes* (Tramway, 1998)
Julie/dolphin Trahan, *Lypsinc* (Lunasea, 1996)
Carmelita Tropicana, *Milk of Amnesia* (CUNY, 1996)
Susan Wase and Rebecca Lane, *Budding* (Arches, 1996)
Lisa Watts, *Bread Making* (Third Eye Centre, 1990)
Lisa Wax, *Excuse Me, What Are You?* (Famous Door, 1996)
Fiona Wright, *Bride Kicks* (Third Eye Centre, 1990)
Lisa Wesley, *Mabblethorpe Donkey* (Arches, 1996)
Kirsten Wilson, *The Amazing Magician's Beautiful Assistant* (Franklin Furnace Dixon Place, 1996)

Various, *Fuckorama* (Lunasea, 1996)
Various, *Love, Sex, Rage* (Lunasea, 1996)
Various, *Stripshow* (Lunasea, 1996)
Various, *Drag King Spoken Word* (NY, 1996)

ii.) Video Documentation (Date indicates date of performance)

Bobby Baker, *The Kitchen Show* (Magdalena, 1994)
Victoria Goodwin Baker, *Dyke 'um Fag* (Randolph Street Gallery, 1994)
Carla Kirkwood, *MWI (Many Women Involved)* (Franklin Furnace, 1995)
Suzanne Lacy, *Underground* (Pittsburgh, 1994)
Suzanne Lacy, *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind* (Southern California, 1984)
Julie Laffin, *Various States of D(u)ress* (Franklin Furnace, 1994)
Susan Lewis, *Talking Loud, Saying Something* (CCA, 1996); originally performed as two shows: *Ladies Falling* (ICA, 1995); *Walking Tall* (ICA, 1993)
Linda Montano, *Mitchell's Death* (San Diego, 1978)
Margaret Nelson, *Pretty for a Dark Girl* (Franklin Furnace, 1995)
Scarlet O, *Appearances Can Be Deceptive* (Franklin Furnace, 1991)
Rachel Rosenthal, *Death Valley* (LA, 1988)
Sacred Naked Nature Girls, *Set 3* (Highway Performance Space, 1994)
Bonnie Sherk, *Public Lunch* (San Francisco Zoo, 1971)
Diane Torr *Maldoror's Grey Lark* (Franklin Furnace, 1995)
Various, *Built* (Lunasea, 1995)
Various, *Femme II* (Lunasea, 1995)

iii.) Mediated Performance

Orlan, *Operation Reussie (Successful Operation)* (1994; viewed at School of the Arts Institute of Chicago, Video Data Bank)
Adrian Piper, *Cornered* (1986; viewed in Museum of Modern Art, Chicago, 1996)

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